

You Have Been Murdered!



You Have Been Murdered!

————— Romans VII XI —————

Michael Scopus

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YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

Romans VII XI

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Although certain historical characters and facts are presented in this book, the story itself is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is coincidental.

All Bible verses taken from the King James Bible.

Visit the dedicated website: www.youhavebeenmurdered.wordpress.com

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Contents

<i>Foreword</i>	vii
Prologue	1
In the Beginning	3
The Manor	6
Jamal Al Jamal	11
Love in London	14
The Most Northerly Mosque	18
The Robbery	22
Armed Response	24
You Have Been Murdered!	29
Crime and Punishment	42
The British Jihadist	47
New Scotland Yard	51
Bitcoins and Bullets	54
A Wake-Up Call	57
The Darknet Deal	66
Operation Titan	68
The Islamic Militant Plot	72
The Drop	76
The Hit	79
The Tip-Off	83
The Confession	89
Christmas Day	110
Snatch and Grab	114
The Die is Cast	119
It is Finished	125
Redemption	131
Epilogue	134



Foreword

This book, although ostensibly a work of fiction, is a modern parable containing thoroughly researched biblical and historical truths. It explains to non-Christians what True Christianity is and elaborates to Christians who the God of Creation is. It also importantly explains to all who the devil is, what he has done, and how he works in our world today.

The main reason for writing this book is to confront the dominant modern atheistic paradigm and to present faith in God not as the reverse of logic, but logic itself. The book sets out to challenge in a 'real-world' setting some of the strongest arguments for not believing. And it challenges Christians to examine themselves to see if they are in the faith, whether they are following Christ or doctrines of men and Church traditions. The book also summarizes all of human history and warns of the eternal consequences of rejecting Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

*For sin, taking occasion by the commandment,
deceived me, and by it slew me.*

—ROMANS VII XI

Prologue

Inverness, Scotland

The city is quiet. It is nearly 9:00 AM on Boxing day morning but Inverness is still bathed in twilight as the sun has not yet risen. Suddenly the still of the morning is broken as a small white van appears, racing over Culloden Bridge with its engine roaring. David brakes hard and turns into the first street on the left. A few seconds later Reggie's gold Mercedes comes roaring over the bridge at seventy miles an hour. Sid notices the cul-de-sac sign at the end of the street where David turned into.

"We got him now, Boss—that's a dead-end street!" said Sid pointing out the road sign.

Jack screeches the Mercedes around the corner into the side street after the van.

The van screeches to a halt in an open car park less than fifty yards from an old stone-built church, the van driver's door flies open, and David sprints across the car park and jumps over the low wall in front of him.

Jack screeches up behind the van blocking its escape as all the Mercedes' doors fly open at once and Reggie and the gang spill out into the car park.

As the four men start to take off after David, Reggie grabs Jack by the arm.

"Jack, you stay with the motor!" Reggie barks, before taking off after the others.

In the yard on the other side of the wall, David squeezes through a gap in the fence and into an overgrown garden on the

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

other side of the yard, as first Sid then Rick and then Reggie jump over the wall and into the yard.

Meanwhile, David lifts up a piece of old plywood lying in the garden and takes a shiny crowbar from underneath before running up the steps to the rear entrance of the old church. The door is padlocked with a chain and David uses the crowbar and levers the lock and chain free of the door. David quickly glances back and sees that the gang are close behind. He pulls the door open and rushes into the building as the door swings shut behind him.

Inside the old church, it is dark. The electricity supply has still not been reconnected. Jamal, Mustafa, and Yousef are unpacking the weapons which they had concealed under a tarpaulin that they will use in the attack at the shopping mall later that day. They are all dressed in Shalwar Kameez¹ and as they work, their flashlights create shadows on the stained-glass windows. They stop as they hear the sound of someone bursting in the backdoor and running into the building.

"What was that?" Whispers Mustafa as they all look nervously at each other with the weapons in their hands.

"Maybe it is Afzal?" whispers Yousef weakly.

Jamal does not look convinced and silently cocks his AK47. The others copy him. Jamal puts his finger to his lips and motions for them to follow him.

Meanwhile, Reggie and his gang follow David through the back door of the old church, pulling out their pistols. David reaches the main entrance of the old church and pulls on the old oak door.

"Oh no you don't!" Reggie bellows as he raises his pistol, silencer attached, aims at David, and fires.

1. The Shalwar Kameez is a traditional dress worn by men and women in South and Central Asia. The Shalwars are loose pajama-like trousers while the Kameez is a long shirt or tunic.

In the Beginning

Inverness, Scotland

The radio announcer was reading the news in a broad Scots accent: “According to a statement released today by Detective Inspector Morrison of Police Scotland, police have identified up to one hundred ‘ISIS’, so-called Islamic State, supporters in Scotland since the terror group rose to prominence.”

The announcer then modified his voice to a lighter tone and continued: “And in local news, traffic on the A9 approaching the south side of the city has come to a standstill as a lorry has jack-knifed shedding its load.”

David switched off the radio. The rain was falling gently on an overcast day in Inverness, Scotland as David drives the small white courier van over Ness Bridge crossing the River Ness and into the city center. He admired, as always, the hue of the red sandstone of the magnificent Inverness Castle peering over the tops of the trees in front of him. It appeared as if the low, gray clouds were almost touching the castle turrets. He revved the engine and geared down, speeding up to enable him to just pass the traffic lights at the end of the bridge before they changed to red. Entering into Bridge Street, he notices a place to stop on the left-hand side at the end of the High Street and parks his van on double yellow no-parking lines. He glances around to ensure there are no traffic wardens in sight and then presses the red hazard lights button on the dashboard of the van. Placing his Tottenham Hotspur’s football club cap firmly on his head he pauses to check himself in the rear-view mirror before stepping out of the van wearing his company issue yellow Hi-Vis vest over his jacket. Taking a parcel from the back of the

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

van he strides off up the High Street on the pastel-colored paving bricks of the pedestrian walkway with the parcel safely tucked under his arm. Nimble weaving his way through the crowds of shoppers without breaking his stride, he rounds the corner into Hamilton Street where he comes face to face with a man dressed in an orange Hi-Vis vest standing in the middle of the path handing out leaflets. David quickly sidesteps to pass him as the man thrusts out a hand with a leaflet to David.

"Please take one, friend," the man smiled as he offered the leaflet. "It could save your life."

Curious, David stopped for a second to take the leaflet with his free hand. He glanced at it. It was upside down. Turning it the right way up he read the bold heading:

'You Have Been Murdered!'

"What? That can't be right," he thought to himself and then read it again:

'You Have Been Murdered!'

"*Well that's just lovely that is.*" he mused to himself. Another wet and cold Monday and now he'd been bloody well murdered!

David glanced back at the man that had handed him the leaflet. The man was wearing a smile but didn't look like he had much to be happy about, standing there on the street corner in his thin anorak and Hi-Vis vest in the cold September rain. Deciding he would keep the leaflet and read it later, David forced a half-smile in return, stuffed the leaflet into his coat pocket, turned up his coat collar against the wind and continued on his way. Entering the doorway directly behind the man, he took the flight of steps in the hallway in front of him two-at-a-time up to the first floor. Pushing open the swing door, he placed the parcel on the desk in front of him. The girl at the desk hardly looked up from reading her magazine but signed on the electronic signature machine that David offered her, said 'cheers' and took the parcel. David took the steps down two-at-a-time and exited the building again all in less than a minute he noted as he glanced at his watch. Not seeing the man with the leaflets outside, he was a bit puzzled that he would have disappeared so soon. He looked up and down the street. The

IN THE BEGINNING

crowd of shoppers had also disappeared, and the previously bustling high street was now deserted.

“That’s strange!” he thought to himself as he strode back to the van looking over his shoulder. It had stopped raining and the sun was beginning to break through the clouds.

The Manor

Inverness, Scotland

David had finished his work as a courier for the day and, as usual, ahead of schedule. He drove back to his flat in North Kessock over the Kessock bridge spanning the Moray Firth, the outlet of the famous Loch Ness to the sea. Although just half an hour ago it had been overcast and raining, the sun, although now low in the sky, was shining brightly and a brilliant rainbow had formed framing the picturesque Cairngorm mountains. He had chosen to live outside of the city because it was isolated and peaceful and the flat specifically because it had a balcony with a good view of the marina at the mouth of the River Ness. He loved to sit on the balcony and watch the boats come in and out.

Inside the flat, David hung his cap on the coat peg by the front door and put his keys in the tray on the small entry table. The flat was sparsely furnished and painted a clean, stark white. The lounge consisted of a small but well-padded and comfortable plain blue fabric couch, a folding wooden dining table with two folding wooden chairs, and a portable color TV on a small cabinet. A portable electric fan heater which David had never used provided the only heating for the flat. The bedroom had an old but comfortable queen-sized bed and a set of drawers and the bathroom had the basic utilities with an electric boiler and shower. The small kitchenette was furnished with a few scattered cupboards, a kitchen sink, a gas stove, and a small fridge on top of the worktop.

THE MANOR

David was in his mid-thirties of average height and athletically built and he kept himself fit. He enjoyed jogging alongside the river when the weather was fine and sometimes went for long walks over the Munros,¹ with their stunningly beautiful views and thick carpets of violet heather. But other than that, apart from work, he didn't go out much so that left him plenty of time to sit on his balcony to watch the boats and reminisce. Although he had only been living here a short while he had already been pleasantly surprised by the warm hospitality of the Scottish Highlanders. David's London accent gave his Englishness away as soon as he opened his mouth, but he found himself accepted wherever he went and felt none of the prejudice for the English so often touted in the media. All in all, he loved living in Scotland and hardly missed the drab streets of London, but he did miss Kathy. David took a bottle and a glass from one of the kitchen cupboards and, sliding back the patio door, exited onto the small balcony where there was a weathered, white plastic table and chair. He sat down on the chair and breathed deeply; the cool evening air formed a small cloud from the condensation of his breath. He unscrewed the top from the 15-year-old Glenfiddich bottle of whisky and poured himself a drink. Gazing down into the yellow liquid swirling around in his glass he thought about how his life had been not so long ago; he remembered the London pub.



"Get 'em in then Davy, it's your shout!" Mark yelled from across bar above the music blaring from the jukebox playing "The boys are back in town", some 1970's throwback.

David was standing at the bar of the Manor Pub in the East-end of London with some of the Mitchell gang having a few drinks and watching the football match on the big screen. The Mitchell gang were an infamous east London gang led by Reggie Mitchell and his younger brother Gary aka Gazza. Rick, Mark, Jack, and Sid (aka Vicious) all young men in their twenties and early thirties

1. A Munro is any mountain in Scotland with a height over 3,000 feet.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

made up the other members of the gang. David was not really a member of the gang but served as the gang's ad hoc getaway driver.

The bar was crowded, and Rick, Mark, and Jack were playing noisily on the pool table, laughing and joking as they did trick shots slamming the balls around the table. Sid was playing on the slot machine with Gary, bashing the side of it and swearing as the machine flashed its lights, its blaring electronic laser-like sound, despite the jukebox, informed the whole bar that they had lost again.

David raised his eyebrows. It was often 'his shout'. But he turned obligingly to Dick the landlord and ordered the drinks.

"Give us five of the usual please Dick and I'll take a large Scotch. Oh, and have one yourself."

Dick was a large man in his late fifties with tattoos festooned on his forearms from his former navy days. He took no nonsense from his customers but even he was wary at upsetting the infamous Mitchell brothers, especially Gary. Gary was called Gazza by his mates after the famous British footballer but that was where the similarity started and ended. Gazza the footballer was known for his emotional outbursts, even openly crying on the pitch when England lost at the 1990 World Cup. Gazza Mitchell, on the other hand, had a violent and uncontrollable temper when things didn't go his way as several men had discovered to their detriment.

"Cheers Davy, rough night eh?" Dick nodded towards Gazza who was now kicking the fruit machine, as he placed the large scotch in front of David.

"Yeah, well you know Gazza." Replied David. As he was speaking and watching Gazza, Gazza looked towards the bar and noticed David and Dick watching him.

"Oh, oh!" said Dick looking away quickly and then disappearing behind the bar to get the rest of the drinks.

"Oh shite!" exclaimed David turning away and lifting his glass to his mouth.

Gazza gave the machine one last kick before staggering across the floor to the bar. He put an arm on David's shoulder and spun him around to face him.

"Talking about ME were ya?" Gazza shouted into David's face while rising on his toes and glaring menacingly.

There was a pause. Everyone in the bar stopped what they were doing and looked at Gazza in morbid fascination as if watching an accident that everyone knew was about to happen.

"No, er, just saying how Dick should get rid of that rip-off one-armed bandit." David's voice sounded a little nervous as he nodded towards the slot machine.

Gazza smiled a crocodile smile.

"Chill man out, I'm only messing with ya!" Gazza shouted to the relief of everyone in the bar who now continued what they were doing.

"Davy, my man!" Gazza exclaimed loudly for the whole bar to hear again as he put a friendly arm around David's shoulder and pulling him close, he spoke quietly into his ear.

"So, it's all set. I need you to drive for me on that job tomorrow. Don't mention it to the others, don't want Reggie finding out, you know how paranoid he gets when I go out for a bit of fun on my own."

"Just the two of us? I dunno, Gazza. You know how he is." David replied a little nervously.

"Reggie won't know. He's away on 'business' and don't get back 'til the day after tomorrow and by then, job's done. Besides, you said you need the money, right? You only gotta do the wheels. Mark got me tooled up an' everything else is sorted. As I said there's fifty grand in this and half is yours. I need to have a crack at this job for myself, prove to Reggie I'm up to it. It's there for the taking. Rude not to, right?"

David nodded his reluctant agreement with a half-smile and raised his glass to his lips.

"So that's sorted." Gazza playfully slapped him twice on the cheek. "You just remember to pick me up at 10 o' clock sharp, right?"

"Come on you Spurs!"² Gazza roared as the big screen TV replayed a slow-motion goal.

2. Spurs short form of Tottenham Hotspur.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!



A large barge was sounding its horn as it passed under Kessock bridge on its way out to the North Sea. David gave a deep sigh as he finished the last of the whisky in his glass. It was the end of another meaningless day.

Jamal Al Jamal

Inverness, Scotland

Ms. Lake, a Scottish social worker from Edinburgh, a pretty, young blond lady in her late twenties in a trouser suit and fancy reading glasses is holding a silver iPad as she sits in the armchair opposite Mr. and Mrs. Bennett who are seated on the couch in their living room in Inverness. Mr. and Mrs. Bennett had both had professional careers. Mr. Bennett was a fit and active fifty-eight-year-old and had worked most of his life as a manager for local Scottish councils until two years ago when he had been offered and accepted a modest early retirement package due to job cuts. Since then he had been involved with many local charities and good causes and could often be seen taking part in local charity fun-runs. Mrs. Bennett was fifty-seven, an attractive, smart lady who had been a teacher at the local primary school for thirty-two years until she too took early retirement last year. She had spent much of the first year of her retirement tending to her immaculate flower garden. The Bennetts were active and social people and, as their two children had long grown up and moved away to Glasgow to university, they had decided together that they wanted to do something useful with their time. They had seen a BBC documentary early last year about the hundreds of thousands of migrants crossing the Mediterranean Sea in dinghies to reach the Greek islands and the unaccompanied children among them and thought it would be a good idea to see if they could help in some way. They had contacted the local social services department eighteen months ago to find out more about the possibility of fostering one of the unaccompanied children. The social service

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

office had put them in touch with Ms. Lake who was in charge of dealing with the children that the UK government had taken from the migrant camp in Calais, France as it was being closed by the French authorities. The couple were rapidly assessed, and Jamal al Jamal was sent to them two months later.

Ms. Lake made a few more ticks in the boxes in the form on the iPad as Mrs. Bennett eyed each Mr. Bennet nervously. Mr. Bennet took Mrs. Bennett's hand reassuringly. The clock on the mantelpiece was ticking much louder than usual until Ms. Lake finally broke the silence.

"So, everything seems to be in order." Said Ms. Lake matter-of-factly.

Mrs. Bennett smiled a relieved smile.

"Yes, you have done very well with Jamal." Ms. Lake confirmed with a formal smile.

"Now, you know that Jamal will turn eighteen in November and therefore as a URM, erm, Unaccompanied Refugee Minor in foster care we will be seeking to re-house him in suitable housing for YP's, er, that is, Young People." Continued Ms. Lake.

Mr. and Mrs. Bennet silently nodded their understanding.

"Now, you said he spends 'a lot of his time in his room?'" Ms. Lake probed quoting from the notes she had made of their meeting on her iPad.

"Yes, that's right." Mrs. Bennett replied emphatically. "We have a high-speed internet service and he spends quite a lot of his time on his laptop computer."

"Hardly goes out at all." Mr. Bennett added helpfully.

"I see." Said Ms. Lake. "Would you characterize him as an introvert, perhaps?"

"Well, I don't know if I would say . . ." Started Mrs. Bennett.

Suddenly the living room door opened and in walked Jamal.

Jamal is a young, dark-skinned, Arabic looking man who appears to be in his mid-twenties. He was born the only son to Palestinian parents in the Yarmouk United Nations refugee camp in Syria. When the camp was attacked by the Islamic State in 2015 his father, fearing for his safety, had given him some money and sent

him to Europe. He had made his way to the west coast of Turkey and then to the Greek island of Lesbos, on an over-crowded boat with two hundred other migrants in the Spring of 2015. The Greek authorities had transferred him to a refugee camp on the mainland in Thessaloniki where he stayed for a week before leaving with a group of other young men and making his way across Europe until he had finally ended up at the unofficial so-called 'Jungle' camp in Calais, France. Here he had tried unsuccessfully several times to hide in lorries bound for the UK but was always discovered and ejected by the immigration authorities. He was found in the camp by British social services as the unofficial camp was being closed by the French government. He told the British social worker that he was sixteen years old as word had spread around the camp that the UK government was going to take unaccompanied children up to eighteen years old to live in the UK. He was taken to the UK with twenty-seven other unaccompanied minors some of whom were placed in foster care within the communities throughout the UK.

"Hello Jamal." Smiled Ms. Lake brightly.

Jamal nodded to Ms. Lake. "I'm going out." He announced simply.

"Won't you stay and have some tea with us?" Asked Mrs. Bennett turning to Jamal.

"No thank you," Jamal replied politely but coldly and turned towards the door.

"Dinner at six!" Mrs. Bennett called after him at the sound of the front door closing.

Mr. Bennet turned to Ms. Lake who was looking a little puzzled.

"Well, he does go out sometimes." Mr. Bennet added helpfully.

Love in London

Inverness, Scotland

David awoke in his flat in Scotland. He reached out to the other side of the bed and his hand clasped an empty pillow. He remembered Kathy. It was cold in the flat. He got up shivering, pulled on his trousers and a thick sweatshirt. Then took his jacket from the coat rack by the front door and put that on and taking his Spur's cap from the peg, he put that on too. Then he lit the gas hob on the kitchen stove, briefly warming his hands on the flame, before filling the kettle with water and placing it on the hob. Opening a cupboard, he took out a mug, a teaspoon and a jar of instant coffee and placed them on the worktop. Standing at the glass patio door while he waited for the kettle to boil, he gazed out over the river. It was a clear, crisp morning and he watched with fascination as a small pod of dolphins swam under the bridge and out to sea. As he followed their progress, he caught his reflection in the glass of the door and focusing on his Spur's cap, remembered the last time he had seen Kathy.



Kathy was still sleeping when he awoke. It was a sunny Monday morning and the sunshine flooded the bedroom of the London flat despite the thin, flower-patterned curtains still being closed. He could smell the roses in the vase on the bedside cabinet that he had bought for Kathy yesterday. He smiled. He was happy. He reached over to Kathy and gently brushed her golden hair from her face, and she opened her eyes. He smiled again and she smiled back.

Kathy and David had been together now for almost a year. David had his own flat less than a mile away but increasingly spent more nights at Kathy's place. They had met when David first started doing jobs for the Mitchell gang. Jack, the youngest member of the Mitchell gang, and David had become good mates almost immediately due to their mutual love of fast cars. Jack had brought David to his mum, Debbie's fortieth birthday party where he had first met Kathy. Kathy, as it turned out, was actually Jack's aunt although only five years older than Jack and they had grown up playing together in the same East London street.

David moved to get up.

"Oh no . . ." She moaned as he sat up in bed.

"Sorry babe but I gotta go." David apologized.

Kathy's face registered disappointment and David noticed.

"Hey, you know I agreed that I would drive for the Mitchells today." David gently reminded her as he sat on the side of the bed and pulled on his socks.

"Is Jack going with you?" Kathy asked.

"No, it's just me and Gazza," David said calmly although he was bracing himself for what he knew was coming.

"Just the two of you?" Kathy said incredulously and now sitting up in the bed.

"More money that way, Sweetheart. Split it fifty-fifty." David replied, standing up and pulling on his trousers.

"I don't like you working with Gazza, David. He's a nutcase!" Exclaimed Kathy.

"Gazza? Nah he's just a big kid really. Besides, he's taking all the risk, I'm just doing the driving." David assured her.

"I don't like it, David." Kathy was upset and wanted David to recognize the fact.

"Hey, don't worry yourself, babe," David reassured her. "I can take care of myself and besides it's just this one more job and then I'll have enough cash to go legit."

"But it's always just one more job!" Kathy sulked.

"Babe don't be like that . . ." David glanced at his watch. "Besides you better get up and get yourself off to school. You don't

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

wanna be late again and get in teacher's bad books." David grinned mischievously.

"But I am the teacher!" Kathy replied her face broke into a reluctant smile despite trying desperately to show how upset she was.

"And the most beautiful one at that!" David replied planting a kiss on her forehead. With that, David pulled on his sweatshirt, picked up his shoes and made for the bedroom door.

"Would you like me to make you some coffee?" She called behind him.

"Coffee? Nah, I'll grab some on the way. See you tomorrow tonight though eh?" he replied.

"Yeah and BE CAREFUL!" She emphasized.

"For you, babe, anything," David reassured her.

Kathy reached over to the bedpost where David's Spurs cap was hanging and placed it on her head.

"Aren't you forgetting something?" She said coyly.

"Oh, yeah, chuck it here, love," said David.

"Come and get it!" Kathy replied temptingly as she pulled the duvet up to her eyes.

"Oh, so now that's your game, is it?" David replied and ran and dived onto the bed as Kathy pulled the duvet over her head and let out an ear-piercing shriek.



The kettle was whistling. David smiled to himself as he savored the memory. He turned off the kettle and placed the coffee jar back into the cupboard.

"I'll grab some on the way." He repeated to himself.

David missed Kathy and reflected on the futility of his life without her. He picked up the leaflet from the kitchen table that he'd been given on his last drop yesterday. He had read it last night before he went to bed. He read it again and noticed the telephone number on the bottom of the leaflet.

"Why not?" he thought to himself.

LOVE IN LONDON

Pulling his mobile phone out of his pocket, he dialed the number.

“Hello, Roy speaking.” answered the voice.

The Most Northerly Mosque

Inverness, Scotland

In a small side street in Inverness, a dilapidated stone building is undergoing renovation. The building was built in the 1800s as a church for the Free Church of Scotland and paid for entirely by donations from the local community. In its heyday, the church was often full to capacity as people came from far around to hear the enigmatic pastor James McDougal speak. After the Second World War, membership began to decline as the old pastor and many other older members gradually died off and the new generation found other things to do with their time other than attend church. Since the late 1980s, attendance had fallen to a mere handful. In 1991, the building was noted to be in need of structural repairs which the small congregation could not afford. As a result, the building had lain dormant for a number of years. Since then the old church had been partially repaired and used successively as a childcare nursery, a social club for highland walkers and more recently, a drop-in youth center. However, the building was officially condemned by the local council two years ago as more serious repairs were required, and since then the old church had stood empty. It had now been purchased quite cheaply by the local Inverness Islamic Society as a property in need of major renovations.

The Malik family are today visiting the old church building that the Islamic Society plans to convert into a mosque. Dr. Malik had been for many years a respected urologist at the city's Raigmore Hospital and as the Chairman of the Inverness Islamic Society, he has been tasked with overseeing the conversion works to be done

for the mosque. Dr. Malik had come to the UK from Islamabad in Pakistan with his family as a small boy and they were one of the first Muslim families to immigrate to Inverness. Dr. Malik was visiting the building today for a preliminary inspection with his two sons, Yousef and Afzal and his only daughter, Nilofer. His oldest son, Yousef is twenty-one years old, unemployed and considers himself a strict Muslim. Yousef was very proud of his family's leading role in building the mosque and had already started an online website touting the mosque as the 'UK's most northerly Masjid'.¹ Nilofer is twenty years old and studying for a medical degree and has hopes one day to follow in her father's footsteps. Nilofer feels protective about her youngest brother, Afzal who has only just turned seventeen years old. She feels that Yousef is a bad influence on him with his strict understanding of Islam and she is suspicious of Yousef's so-called friends. Afzal left school at sixteen much to his father's disappointment with very poor grades and only a single GCSE in math. He had gotten a job at the local Tesco supermarket but quit after only two weeks. A kind-hearted young man, his lack of academic ability is only surpassed by the abundance of his love for his family. His loyalty to his siblings is conflicted between the reciprocated love of his sister and respect for his older brother.

Inside the old building, there are large empty plastic paint tubs doubling as buckets strategically placed around the floor to catch the water from the leaking roof. A few old broken wooden chairs make up the sum of the furnishings and an old gray tarpaulin doubles as a carpet covering part of the floor. The floor itself is covered by layers of dust and several of the walls have holes in them where the plaster has come away. However, none of this dampens the enthusiasm of Dr. Malik.

"So, this is the south-east side of the building so this will be the Qibla² wall." Announced Dr. Malik to his children running his hand along the wall affectionately.

1. Masjid: Arabic transliteration meaning: Mosque.

2. The Qibla is the direction that should be faced when a Muslim prays. It is fixed as the direction of the Kaaba in the city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

"Of course, we'll have to remove all this old shelving. And then this would be a good spot for the Mihrab."³ He continued enthusiastically.

"And we can definitely have a mosque kitchen," exclaimed Nilofer excitedly as she inspected the old sink and cooker.

"What do you know?" retorted her older brother Yousef. "You've never been to a mosque, and you never pray, you just hang out with your kafir⁴ friends."

"Just because I'm not a fanatic like you and your friend Jamal does not mean that I do not believe." Nilofer snapped back.

"How can you say that?" demanded Yousef. "Jamal is a good Muslim!"

"If you want to ruin your life then that is your problem." Retorted Nilofer, "Just keep Afzal out of it!"

"*Astagfirullah*⁵ sister, you have no *Haya*,⁶ you . . ." retaliated Yousef.

"That's enough!" thundered Dr. Malik. "This place will be our mosque. You will treat it with respect. I won't hear any more arguing."

They all fell silent.

Afzal looked out of one of the stained-glass windows onto the street and saw Jamal walking towards the old building.

"Jamal is here!" Afzal exclaimed to his brother pointing out of the window.

"Come, brother, let's go see him," Yousef said smiling.

"Afzal, you will stay here with us." Nilofer smiled at her younger brother. Nilofer sensed that Jamal was trouble and she was hoping to persuade her young brother to stay away from him.

Afzal looked at his older brother for what to do.

3. The Mihrab is a semi-circular niche in the wall of a mosque that indicates the qibla.

4. Kafir is an Arabic term meaning: infidel or unbeliever.

5. *Astagfirullah* an Islamic expression of disapproval meaning: shame.

6. *Haya* is an Arabic word that means: sense of modesty.

"Come on, Afzal. Don't listen to a girl!" Yousef glared at Nilofer as he put an arm around Afzal's shoulder and guided him to the door.

The two Malik brothers rushed out the old oak door to greet Jamal as Nilofer scoffed, stamped her foot, spun on her heels and then rejoined her father as he continued with the inspection.

"As-Salaam-Alaikum⁷ brother!" Yousef declared as he hugged Jamal with the traditional Pakistani one-armed hug.

"Wa-Alaikum-Salaam⁸ my brothers!" Jamal replied as he hugged both the brothers.

"You have come to see our mosque which we are going to build." Exaggerated Afzal.

Jamal raised his index finger. "Insha'Allah,⁹ brother, Insha'Allah." Jamal reminded him.

"Yes, of course, Insha'Allah, of course." Afzal agreed sheepishly.

"Come on, come in and see." Yousef urged.

"Another time brother, Masha' Allah,¹⁰ my brothers. It is a fine building indeed and a worthy work, but we have another business to do today. I want to introduce you to a new brother. His name is Mustafa and he has recently come to the faith and has a fire in his heart for Sharia.¹¹ He has been communicating with a brother in the Ummah¹² Come let us go and see him."

They all walk off towards Mustafa's house talking excitedly. Afzal looks back at the window of the old church and sees his sister watching them walk away. He quickly looks away and continues walking with the others.

7. As-Salaam-Alaikum is the Arabic greeting meaning: Peace be unto you.

8. Wa-Alaikum-Salaam is the Arabic response to the Arabic greeting and means: And unto you peace.

9. Insha'Allah an Arabic expression meaning: If Allah wills it.

10. Masha'Allah is an Arabic exclamation meaning: Allah has willed it!

11. Sharia Islamic law is a religious law and the basis of state law in many Islamic countries.

12. Ummah is an Arabic word meaning: Islamic community.

The Robbery

London, England

David and Gazza are sitting in the silver C Class Mercedes that Gazza had ‘acquired’ last week and kept in Reggie’s rented lockup garage on the local council housing estate. David keeps the engine purring and they both sip from takeaway coffees in Starbucks paper cups that David had ‘grabbed on the way’. The rain is falling softly and is brushed away from the windscreen intermittently by a silent swish of the windscreen wipers. They watch in the car’s wing mirrors as people enter and exit the Santander Bank twenty yards behind the car. Gazza decides the time is right and turns to David.

“So, look, it’s like I said, the response time for the armed fuzz¹ is eight minutes, anything that shows up before that is not going to want to tackle me with this.”

Gazza nodded to the AK47 assault rifle held between his knees, the butt of which he had placed on the floor of the car.

“Six minutes we agreed.” David reminded him. He took his watch off his wrist and set the timer function to zero.

“Yeah six minutes, you just keep the engine running, Davy boy.” Gazza playfully slapped him twice on the cheek.

Gazza wrapped the sackcloth around the gun and stepped out of the car and pulled down the rubber mask of Arnold Schwarzenegger over his face.

He pointed the gun through the window at David.

Exaggerating the Schwarzenegger accent, he teased. “Ahl bee bahk!”

1. Fuzz—British English slang for Police.

THE ROBBERY

"Nutter." David mumbled under his breath and sank lower in his seat pulling his Spurs cap down over his eyes as Gazza swaggered off towards the bank. As Gazza entered the bank door, David started the timer function on his watch and placed it on the dashboard.

Gazza swung open the door of the bank, marched in and brought the gun up towards the lone young girl at the only open counter who jumped up and threw up her hands.

"That's right, it's a robbery!" Gazza barked. "Don't touch any alarms sweetheart."

Gazza swung the gun around at the handful of customers in the bank. "Now everyone, DOWN ON THE FLOOR!"

Everyone stood in silence and raised their hands slightly, purposely avoiding eye contact with Gazza.

"NOW!" barked Gazza.

Everyone quickly and quietly sat down on the floor keeping their hands raised.

The manager came out of his office. "What's all this noise . . . ?" He squinted his eyes and adjusted his glasses as Arnold Schwarzenegger turned and pointed a gun directly at him.

"Oh, I see . . ." he muttered as he feebly raised his hands.

Gazza grabbed him by the shoulder and spun him around and placed the gun behind him with the barrel in the nape of his neck.

"Now listen to me, everyone!" Gazza announced. "There are three simple rules: Anyone sets off an alarm, everyone dies. Anyone tries to escape, everyone dies. Anyone fails to cooperate . . ." He shook the manager roughly by the shoulder. ". . . what do you think, Mr. Manager?" Gazza demanded.

"Er, everyone dies?" The manager offered weakly.

"That's right!" Bellowed Gazza. "So, the only way we all get out of this alive, is if we all cooperate. So now Mr. Manager, you have exactly three minutes to fill this sack." Gazza shoved the manager towards the cashier door. "GO!"

Armed Response

London, England

Liz edged forward another twenty feet in the dense London morning traffic and then pulled up behind the other cars waiting at the traffic lights. Her high visibility blue and yellow checkered BMW X5 patrol car stood out from the other cars and the circular yellow stickers on the rear bodywork indicated that this was an armed response vehicle or ARV. She had been working for SCO19, the UK's armed response police,¹ for almost two years now. During that time, she had never had to un-holster her standard-issue Glock 17 pistol on duty, although she had used the Taser almost every week, usually on aggressive alcoholics or drug addicts. The ARV's two, standard-issue Heckler and Koch MP5 automatic rifles were safely secured in the vehicle's trunk. Jim her regular partner had retired last week. Mick, her new partner was a bit younger than Liz and was obviously new to the unit. She had seen him around the station this past week but not had the opportunity to speak with him. Mick had been assigned to replace Jim and today was their first day on patrol together. They had been driving now for almost two hours and Mick had hardly said a word. Liz found that hours driving through London's clogged streets can quickly become monotonous without some conversation. The silence in the car was bothering Liz who had enjoyed her chats with Jim who would often regale her with stories of policing the streets of London in the 'good old days'. She glanced over at Mick as she checked the passenger side mirror. He was sat bolt upright with his

1. Only a very small minority of specially trained police officers routinely carry firearms in the UK.

arms folded. Liz noticed the 'short back and sides' military-style haircut and the UK forces tattoos on Mick's forearms.

"So, Mick, you're ex-military, huh?" She nodded to his forearms.

Mick followed her gaze down to his forearms.

"Two tours of Afghanistan with the Paras."² he replied matter-of-factly.

"So, how'd you end up in ARV's?" Liz offered, prompting the conversation along.

"Got out last year, the Army's fine an' all but I figured I'd done my bit and looking to settle down. Got a nipper at home and another on the way now so I was looking for a job, you know, but with my skill set there wasn't much on 'Civvy Street'. So, it was either this or a security job in some warehouse somewhere drinking endless cups of tea." Mick replied.

"What about yourself?" Mick asked.

"Me, oh I . . ." Liz spluttered as she tried to recall the exact moment in her life that has set off the unlikely chain of events that had led her to become one of the first female armed officers of London's Metropolitan Police.

Suddenly the police band radio burst into life.

"TROJAN 2, TROJAN 2!"

"Saved by the bell!" Mick smiled at Liz and took the radio. "Base this is Trojan 2. Send over."

"TROJAN 2, PROCEED TO THE SANTANDER BANK AT 15 ISLINGTON HIGH STREET—WE HAVE A CODE 2 IN PROGRESS WITH A POSSIBLE CODE 44, OVER." The voice on the radio instructed.

Liz activated the lights and siren. The sudden deafening scream of the wailing siren sent the traffic shunting sideways the little that they could move to make way for her car. Liz stepped on the accelerator and swung out into the oncoming traffic on the other side of the road.

"Base this is Trojan 2, Received and Understood. Proceeding to Santander Bank, 15 Islington High Street, Code 2. Possible

2. British army parachute regiment.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

Code 44. Out.” Mick replied as he accepted the address on the on-board computer which activated the GPS route map.



David was still sitting in the car watching the bank door through the rear-view mirror. He glanced again at the watch on the dashboard as the display now showed six minutes and ten seconds had passed.

“Come on, come on Gazza . . .” David nervously drummed his fingers on the dashboard.

David took another sip of his now cold coffee and he continued looking in the rear-view mirror. He notices two women pushing pushchairs past the entrance to the bank. To distract himself, David pulls his mobile phone from his pocket and checks for any messages. There aren’t any. The smiley-face air freshener dangling from the rear-view mirror seems to mock his rising anxiety. Suddenly he notices blue flashing lights in the rear-view mirror. He adjusts the mirror to see a police car, picking its way through the traffic coming up the High Street from the west end still about 500 yards away.

He glances again at the watch on the dashboard which shows that seven minutes have now passed.

“Oh shite!” David takes a last look at the door of the bank. Still no sign of Gazza.

“OK, Sorry Gazza, seven minutes, I’m outta here,” David mumbles to himself as he takes the watch from the dashboard and places it back on his wrist.

David indicates as he slowly pulls out into traffic and heads east down the High Street as police sirens start to fill the air. He turns first left into a side street as Liz’s BMW screeches around the corner into the side street from the other end on the wrong side of the road narrowly missing the silver Mercedes. For a split second as they fly passed each other Liz glances at the driver of the Mercedes. David looks away adjusting his Spurs cap on his head

ARMED RESPONSE

and drives on as Liz refocuses on the street ahead and screeches around the next corner and into the High Street from the east end.



Gazza glances at his watch. "Time's up!" He bellows.

He marches over to the manager and the cashier and snatches the sack that they have been filling and gives it a shake to feel the weight. He grunts that he is not impressed and points the gun at the Manager who puts up his hands and nervously takes his wallet from his jacket pocket and offers it to Gazza who lets him drop it in the sack.

Sirens begin to fill the air inside the bank and the customers still sitting on the floor exchange nervous glances. Gazza runs to the door to see a regular police patrol car pull up outside the bank. He looks up the street for the silver Mercedes. It's gone.

"Shit, shit, shit! I'm not going back inside. Not for no one!" Rages Gazza.

He steps outside the door and points the gun at the lone unarmed policeman exiting the patrol car who raises his hands. Gazza laughs maniacally and makes off down the east end of the High Street.

Just then, Liz's car lurches around the corner from the east end of the High Street and screeches to a halt outside the bank.

"Suspect IS armed!" Mick confirms as he spots Arnold Schwarzenegger running towards them with a bag in one hand and a rifle in the other.

Liz reacts immediately, pulling the lever to release the trunk as Mick leaps out of the car and sprints around the back to get the Heckler and Koch's.

Gazza sees he's outnumbered, turns and heads back up the west end of the High Street towards the unarmed policeman, who, having lowered his hands, now raises them again.

Liz steps out of the car and has a line of fire from behind the driver's door. She raises her Glock pistol and shouts a warning.

"ARMED POLICE, DROP YOUR WEAPON!"

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

Gazza spins around on his heels and brings up his gun towards Liz. Liz hesitates. Gazza lets rip of the full magazine. A deafening clattering roar fills the air as the bullets fly into the ARV shattering glass and peppering the car with bullet holes as Liz dives headlong into the car.

“Hasta la vista, BABY!” Gazza shouts excitedly.

A second later Mick pops up from behind the back of the ARV with a Heckler and Koch and fires a three-round burst into Gazza’s chest.

You Have Been Murdered!

Inverness, Scotland

David is sitting in the front window of a café in Inverness High Street with two large coffees in elegant mugs placed on the table in front of him. The Eden café was a comfortable coffee bar decorated with black and white framed photos on the walls of famous people drinking coffee. The aroma of fresh ground coffee filled the café and filtered out onto the street and was particularly effective at attracting passers-by. After calling Roy on the telephone at the number on the leaflet, Roy had suggested to meet at this café at 11:00 AM. David had arrived early. He was jotting down some thoughts on a piece of A4 paper as he sipped his coffee and waited for Roy. Outside the window, it is a fine autumn day and the sun is shining brightly making it a little warmer than usual for this time of year. Across the street, David could see a bagpiper playing, dressed in a white short-sleeved shirt, tartan kilt, and long white socks. The tune he was playing sounded familiar to David. He remembered he had heard it before on the radio in his van.

Rod Stewart was the artist he remembered, that famous Scottish musician from the 1980s, but what was the name of the song?

“Amazing Grace!” Said Roy suddenly appearing at the table and smiling as he offered his hand to David.

“What . . . ?” Said David, a little surprised to see Roy standing next to him. He had not noticed him enter the café.

“The song!” said Roy as he nodded his head towards the bagpiper.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

David was even more surprised that Roy had seemed to know what he had been thinking. He stuffed the paper he was writing on into his left jacket pocket and stood to shake Roy's hand.

"Yes, yes, I knew it was a Rod Stewart song," David replied as motioned his hand for Roy to sit. "Please, take a seat."

"Aye,¹ you've a good memory, but actually it's a lot older than Rod Stewart. In fact, about two hundred years older." Replied Roy as he took a seat at the table.

"But I expect you didn't call me to talk about old pop songs." He smiled.

"No," agreed David pushing the second mug towards Roy. "I got you a coffee."

"Cheers!" Said Roy placing the mug in front of him.

David pulled the leaflet from his right jacket pocket and placed it on the table in front of him.

"Actually, I wanted to talk about this leaflet," said David.

"OK." Nodded Roy.

"There's some pretty controversial statements here," said David with his index finger on the leaflet. "I mean . . ." He started reading from the leaflet. "You have been murdered!" "You must be born again." "Only in Jesus Christ can we find life." and . . . "Understanding the Bible answers the meaning of life."

"It's all true." Said Roy.

"But what does it all mean?" David asked waving his hand across the leaflet.

"In a nutshell, it means that we are all dead, David, and the cause of all of our deaths is MURDER!" Roy stated emphatically.

"We are all dead? So, are you saying that none of this is real?" David replied incredulously motioning his hand around the bar and the street outside the window.

"Oh, it's real alright." Replied Roy. "We've all been REALLY murdered," Roy emphasized.

"OK, so explain it to me!" David demanded folding his arms.

1. Aye. Scottish meaning: Yes

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

"Take this coffee for example." Roy picked up the mug in front of him. "You bought this coffee for me and gave me it to drink, aye?" asked Roy.

"Of course." Replied David, a little disappointed by the simplicity of the statement. He was hoping for something a bit more profound, more meaningful. Something to give meaning to his own life.

"Now, supposing you knew that it had something in it that was poisonous to me and deceived me by telling me it was good to drink, and I believed you and drank it and it killed me. Would you say that that was murder?" Asked Roy putting the mug of coffee to his lips and drinking.

"That would technically be murder, I guess. I mean, if you didn't know what was in it and I knew that what was in it was poisonous to you and gave it to you to drink and you drank it and it killed you. Yep, that sounds like murder. But I still don't get it." David replied with more interest.

"There is a true God, David, just as there is a real devil. This devil was a murderer from the beginning, and he has deceived you just as he has deceived all of us and indeed all mankind. You have been robbed and deceived. Robbed of life and deceived into death. By deceiving us into death the devil is committing genocide or rather as I call it 'Anthropocide', that is the systematic destruction of mankind and over the years and he's become quite adept at it." Roy informed very seriously.

"You're saying that I have been deceived by the devil? Is that what you are saying?" Asked David incredulously.

"Aye, they say that it's easier to deceive people than to convince them that they have been deceived." Replied Roy.

"Now that may be true." Agreed David.

"It is true," Roy assured him. "We don't want to believe we could be so gullible. But the devil has robbed us of the greatest gift that mankind could ever have: Eternal life."

"But a real devil? Replied David incredulously. I'm not sure I believe in a real God let alone a real devil!"

"Oh, he's real alright." Answered Roy.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

David thought for a moment.

"OK, I have some questions," said David pulling out of his left jacket pocket the A4 paper with his notes. "Do you mind?"

"Not at all, fire away!" said Roy.

"The Bible says that people were created by God, doesn't it?" Asked David reading from the first item on his list.

"Aye, the Bible says that God created man and he created him in the image of God," answered Roy.

"So, what about evolution? Isn't it now in the twenty-first century an accepted scientific fact that all life evolved from like a primordial soup or something like that?" Asked David.

"Not at all!" Replied Roy. "Evolution is a theory and quite a poor one at that. To be a scientific fact we have to be able to demonstrate and replicate the hypothesis. Strangely enough, no-one has been able to replicate life from an inorganic bowl of soup and yet it is taught as fact that life started that way. Also, there are no fossils of animals evolving from one type of animal to another and there are no animals around today that show signs of evolving into anything else. Many of today's scientists claim that animals have evolved through a mutation of genes. However, mutation never brings additional genetic information only a loss of information, so the species becomes less advanced not more advanced. It is true though that certain animals thrive better in certain habitats and therefore become the dominant type in that area as Darwin noted with long-necked tortoises but that is as far as it goes. It is like stating the obvious fact that tall men are more likely to succeed at basketball! Out of an obvious fact of some animals thriving better in some habitats, Darwin made a laughable whole theory of evolution. In short, there is no evidence for such a theory. To say we descended from apes is indeed laughable. If that were true why are apes not talking? They have been around for longer than us and so they would have had a lot longer to evolve! In fact, of all creation, mankind is the youngest exactly as the Bible tells us because God created mankind last. But that our closest relative is an ape is a theory that even a small child would wet his pants laughing at if he wasn't indoctrinated with it as fact in school." Said Roy.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

David was impressed by Roy's reasoning, but he was far from convinced.

"So, you believe God created everything?" Asked David.

"Indeed," replied Roy.

"But how can anybody be sure that God even exists?" Asked David.

"Can we believe in an eternal God who created all things? Well, I presume that you believe that we exist although we have no proven scientific explanation for our existence. Science has a history of being proved wrong. What is accepted as irrefutable scientific fact today is infrequently proved false tomorrow only for a new irrefutable scientific fact to emerge. But even science can get close enough to the truth sometimes. Modern science tells us that everything came into existence by the so-called 'Big Bang' however this theory defies the laws of thermodynamics which are fundamental to our modern understanding of science. You see the first principle of the first law of thermodynamics states that energy can be neither created nor destroyed only changed from or into something else. Therefore, if there was a big bang there had to be something to make the big bang in the first place. Incidentally, this is what the so-called Large Hadron Collider is trying to discover deep underground on the border between France and Switzerland. They are in fact looking for evidence for the so-called 'God Particle' from the big bang. Anyway, from this law of thermodynamics we understand that everything that exists, exists as a form of energy, you know as Einstein discovered, energy equals mass times the speed of light squared or ' $E=mc^2$ ' and all that, and, as energy cannot be created or destroyed therefore everything that exists today has existed as something eternally. Now from this principle, we understand that something has existed eternally and that something created the whole universe. The Bible tells us that God has existed eternally, and that God created the whole universe." Replied Roy.

David reflected for a moment. He did not feel that he could fault the logic, so he looked down at his list and read the next item.

"Is God good?" Asked David.

"Aye, He is." Replied Roy.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

"And all-powerful?" Asked David.

"Aye, He is." Replied Roy.

"Well if God is good and all-powerful why is there so much evil in the world? Why doesn't he stop it?" asked David.

"It is not God's job to overcome evil in the world. It is ours." Replied Roy rather bluntly.

"Why do you say that?" Asked David incredulously.

"When God created the world, it was good and without death and suffering. It was mankind's sin that allowed all the evil and suffering to enter into the world." Replied Roy.

"But that was then. Why would God allow suffering today?" Asked David.

"Suffering and death is the result of sin, mankind's transgression of the Law of God which is the Law of Life. This transgression of the law caused the death of Adam and Eve and as we are their descendants and share their DNA, we inherit that sin and consequent death. After Adam and Eve sinned, God cursed the world that through suffering we will learn to understand the consequence of sin and choose life over death." Replied Roy.

"That doesn't sound like much empathy for the people who suffer with diseases and die in disasters and wars every day." Noted David.

"God empathizes with and understands our suffering as he sent his only born Son, Jesus Christ into the world who suffered and died for our sins to restore us to God. Jesus taught his disciples to do good works of charity in the world so that God will be glorified by them and all true Christians are disciples of Christ. But more importantly, Jesus commanded us to share the good news of the Gospel which is the greatest gift that we can give to anyone. The Gospel contains the meaning of life and the key to eternal life. God promises eternal life to them who love him and, in that life, there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor pain, for those things will have passed away. We all suffer in this world at some time and, of course, we will all eventually die. What is vitally and ultimately important is not that we suffer and die in this world, but what happens next." Replied Roy.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

David thought for a moment. If Roy was right and there was an afterlife, then his argument had a certain logic. He decided to move on to his next point.

“OK, I can understand why Christians believe what they do but does the world really need another religion? Isn’t religion just a way of controlling people, especially the poor, telling them they have to suffer in this world to get into the next while the priests live it up in the here and now?” Asked David.

“While that may be true for some world religions it is not of true Christianity. Christ came to set us free from sin, not enslave us. Christ told us that true Christian leaders in the world will serve us, not lord it over us. Christianity is not just another religion; it is the only true religion and the only true way of life.” Roy replied.

David was still unconvinced with what he heard. He looked down and consulted his list again.

“What do you say when people say that all wars are caused because of religion?” He asked.

“That’s one of those sayings that people believe because everyone knows the saying but that doesn’t make it true. While there are undoubtedly wars fought in the name of religion, statistically, most wars are still primarily caused by disputes over territory. And don’t forget, both of the world wars were fought over territory. Having said that God is sovereign of the whole world and he always knows exactly what is happening in the world. No major world event, war or otherwise, happens that he does not cause or allow.” Replied Roy.

“Hmm.” Mumbled David. If God really did exist, and he was supposed to be all-powerful, then he couldn’t see how he could disagree with that statement, so he decided to move on with his questions.

“They say that God, in the Bible, commanded his people, the Israelites, to kill entire cities of men, women, and children. If God is good, why would he do that?” Asked David.

“I will answer that question but first I would like to ask you a question.” Said Roy.

“OK.” Replied David sitting up straight and folding his arms.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

“Would you be happy if someone tried to tell you what to do with your own property?” Asked Roy.

“No, of course not. It is my right to do what I want with my own property.” Replied David. “Wait, are you in some way implying that we are somehow God’s property?” Asked David incredulously.

“Exactly that.” Replied Roy. “God is good, and he created us all, we are his property like it or not. But God does not destroy what he has created for no reason. The people you refer to in the Old Testament were irredeemably evil. The Bible says that among other things they were sacrificing their children in fire to demons. Therefore, God determined to completely destroy those evil nations and give their land to the Israelites for an inheritance. Ultimately, it is God’s right to do what he will with his own property.”

David thought for a moment. He did not like the thought of being anyone’s property, but Roy had a point. If God had created us, we would be his property, so he decided to leave that point and continue to the next on his list.

“But then there are so many religions, who’s to say which one is right which one is wrong or if they are all wrong?” Asked David.

“As I said, Christianity is the only one that will set you free, the others will enslave you. When you understand Christianity, you understand the meaning of life because you understand that our life is our chance to be redeemed to God through his Son Jesus Christ.” Replied Roy.

“Hmm . . .” David thought for a moment and then added a new point to his list.

“What makes Jesus so special from the other great men of history?” Asked David.

“Jesus said that he was the Son of the Only True God. He lived without sin. He preached the good news of eternal life. He also miraculously healed the sick, cast out demons and raised the dead. He suffered and gave his life in this world for us to show us the way to eternal life. He then rose from the dead as witnessed by many who willingly gave their lives to share this truth. No other person in all of history has done these things so Jesus is very different from all other philosophers, preachers or prophets. Jesus is

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

the only born Son of the living God and there is no other name given to mankind by the true God through which we can receive salvation.” Informed Roy.

“Salvation.” David nodded. “But aren’t there many ways to salvation or nirvana or heaven? Isn’t it just a bit narrow-minded to think that Jesus is the only way?” Asked David trying not to sound impolite.

“Jesus himself said: ‘I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.’ So, no there is no other way.” Informed Roy.

“So, you’re saying the only way to salvation is Jesus, basically to become a Christian. I admit I don’t know much about Jesus and no disrespect and all but some of the people I have known who have called themselves Christian appeared to be the greatest hypocrites. They say one thing but do the other.” David noted.

“Christians don’t claim to be perfect, just forgiven. We are a work in progress.” Roy admitted.

“Yes, but excuse me for saying but that doesn’t really cut it. What about the mass murders and atrocities Christians have committed throughout history?” Asked David incredulously.

“Many Christians struggle with their faith but not everyone who calls themselves Christian is indeed Christian. Christ said there would be false Christians and we would know them by their fruits; in other words, by what they do, what they produce. If what they consistently do does not conform with the Christianity of the New Testament, then they are not behaving as Christians and therefore they are probably not Christian.” Roy replied.

“But what about the pedophile sex crimes in the Catholic Church and all the Crusades and the witch burnings weren’t they all carried out by Christians?” Asked David.

“As I said, just because people call themselves Christian does not mean that they are Christian. If you want to know what it is to be a Christian read the New Testament. Ultimately all who offend God and die without genuine repentance will be judged and those found unworthy of eternal life will be thrown into what the Bible

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

calls 'the lake of fire,' regardless of whether they call themselves Christian or not." Replied Roy.

David was starting to understand what Roy's belief was, it made sense, but he was still far from convinced himself. He looked down and read from his list again. He knew this next question would probably sound offensive, so he was careful how he phrased it.

"What do you say to people that say that Christianity is just a crutch?"

"Aye, I've heard that. Indeed, Christians do lean on God's understanding rather than our own so I guess you could say that we lean on or depend on God. Everyone depends on something in this world. Many people depend on their governments to provide for them but at the same time, they see a lot of corruption in the world. Christians are well aware of the corruption of this fallen world and while we hope for the best with our governments, we depend on God first and foremost to supply all our needs. God loved us first and he sent his Son to prove that to us. Our confidence is not in ourselves, but we have confidence in Christ. Just as Christ overcame the world, he has promised to help us overcome the world also. Christ told us not to worry about what we will eat or drink or wear because the unbelievers worry about those things. He told us to seek first the Kingdom of God and all these things will be provided for us. And we must believe that by pure faith. So, no, I would not say that Christianity is a crutch, it is the throwing away of the crutch of reliance on a fallen world and stepping out in faith with the one true God." Replied Roy.

David was still writing, adding to his list as Roy finished speaking.

"You said: 'God loved us first' but I don't see much evidence of God's love in the world," David said reading from what he had just written.

"People show their love to others in so many ways; by buying them nice gifts, being affectionate with them or just spending time with them. But the highest expression of love is to sacrifice our life to save others. Jesus says in the New Testament; 'For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.' For God is love. But the unbelievers of the world reject this love because to accept it would mean that they would have to admit that they are sinners and that Christ died for them. The very name of Jesus and his sacrifice reminds them that they are sinners and because of that they hate him and his followers. So, you are right, there is not much evidence of God's love in this world because few people to-day follow God's ways, but Jesus left Christians with two missions to fulfill while we are in this world. The first is to keep the faith without which we will not inherit eternal life, and the second is to share the faith. Therefore, it is Christians who show the evidence of God's love in the world by sharing the good news of Jesus Christ and salvation to everyone, because we all need salvation, because we are all sinners." Replied Roy.

"I wouldn't say I'm a sinner. Sure, I've done some stuff I regret but I'm not so bad and there are plenty of people worse than me. I think that trying to be a good person is all that really matters." Said David defensively.

"Being a good person is subjective and depends on your perspective. For example, terrorists believe that they are doing good by murdering civilians who do not share their ideology. They call themselves freedom fighters or martyrs. Others believe they are doing good by killing the terrorists, freedom fighters and martyrs. Without a supreme standard to govern all mankind, who is right and who is to say who is right?" Asked Roy.

"I don't know, human consensus?" offered David.

"So, majority rules. So, if you have fifty-one people out of a hundred in a community that say it is ok to murder, then is murder OK?" Asked Roy rhetorically.

"I don't know, I guess if that's what the majority of the community want." Offered David weakly.

"But if the fifty-one percent want to murder some of the forty-nine percent what you would have is tyranny over the minority. God's law works for the benefit of all and that is why in most societies you will find that murder is illegal." Roy informed.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

"I see what you mean," said David. "I know I've made some bad choices in life, but I still don't think I'm a sinner."

"Aye, but nobody really does. The Bible says that all people justify themselves in their own eyes. But God tells us in the Bible that sin is transgression of God's law and it leads to death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ." Informed Roy.

"Tell me more about this eternal life," David asked.

"How much time have you got?" Roy asked.

David glanced at his watch. "I've got time."

"Then read this and then we can meet again, and I'll explain the whole story." Said Roy placing a New Testament on the table in front of David.

"Can't you just tell me what it says?" asked David.

"I could but it is important to read it for yourself the first time. Don't let anyone tell you what it means or color your understanding. Let the Word of God speak for itself. When you have read the four Gospels, the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, call me and we can meet again." Roy replied.

David looked down at the book. Of course, he'd seen a New Testament before, but he had never owned one and certainly, no one had ever given him one.

"The Bible was written by people, wasn't it?" asked David picking up the book.

"What you have there is the New Testament. The complete Bible contains both the Old Testament and the New Testament and was written over a period of 1,500 years by around 40 different authors, each of them guided to write by the Holy Spirit of God." Replied Roy.

"I've heard people say the Bible has errors, is that true?" asked David flipping through the pages.

"The Bible is correct in its original languages and although there may be a few differences, a good translation like this one is about as perfect as you can get without learning the original Hebrew and Greek. It is enough for you to know if it is true or not." Replied Roy.

"How will I know for certain if it is true or not?" Asked David.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

“We know that more than a quarter of the Bible is prophecy and most of that which was prophesied to happen has already happened exactly as prophesied and the rest is still being fulfilled. The Bible is living history, it is the Word of God and God is true. But I cannot make you believe it is true, no one can do that. If you want to know for certain if it is true or not you must read it for yourself.” Said Roy.

David thought for a moment then closed the book.

“OK, you’re on.” David decided, putting the book into his inside jacket pocket. “But I warn you I’m a fast reader and I’ve got a lot of time on my hands right now so I may get back to you quite soon.”

Crime and Punishment

London, England

Reggie Mitchell strode purposefully through the green ‘nothing to declare’ lane at London Gatwick airport with his black leather briefcase in his right hand and black Armani raincoat hanging over his left arm. Reggie was a smart-looking man in his mid-forties, clean-shaven and hair well-cut. He always wore a suit and tie with a handkerchief in his top pocket which made him look more like a west-end theatre director than an east-end gangster. But a gangster he was and ruthless with it. Reggie had a reputation and his enemies feared him but respected the fact that Reggie never harmed women or kids. That was his rule. His only other rule was that nobody touches Gazza, —NEVER. Someone had f _ _ _ ed¹ up and Reggie was coming to make that someone pay. Rick was waiting for him in the arrivals hall and immediately took his briefcase and coat for him.

“Nice flight, Boss?” Rick asked.

“Yeah, my baby brother is lying dead in a morgue somewhere, but the flight was nice.” Reggie retorted sarcastically. “Now, where’s my motor?” He barked.

“Jack is waiting in the drop-off zone,” Rick replied soothingly as he struggled to keep pace with Reggie.

They continue walking toward Departures.

“What I wanna know is where Gazza got the shooter from!” Reggie continued angrily.

1. F _ _ _ ed: Past tense of a common four-letter English swear word ending in uck. However, the reader may insert another word such as flip or fuss, or simply pronounce the word as ef.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT

"Boss, er . . ." Rick warned as he nodded towards the two heavily armed policemen standing outside a duty-free shop as they walked past them, and then lowered his gaze to the ground.

"F _ _ _ 'em, f _ _ _ them all! F _ _ _ ing murderers!" Reggie snapped.

Outside the terminal, Jack spotted Reggie and Rick coming through the doors and pulled Reggie's Gold Range Rover into the drop off zone. Rick opened the back door and Reggie climbed in.

"Take me to my brother." Reggie snapped as Rick closed the door for him.



Later the same day, Mark was sitting on a barstool in the snug bar of the Manor Pub studying the front-page story in 'The Sun' newspaper. "DAYLIGHT ROBBERY" the headlines screamed under a photo of a body covered with a blood-stained blanket lying in the street outside a branch of the Santander bank. Mark turned the page and looked over to Dick the landlord.

"Another Tennent's extra when you're ready, Dick." Mark waved his empty glass at Dick who was standing behind the bar drying glasses with a tea towel.

"Right up." Dick nods and starts to draw the pint.

Sid and Rick enter the bar quietly and stand behind Mark who is studying the photo in the newspaper of the bullet-riddled police car.

"Hello, Mark!" Sid spoke into Mark's ear causing Mark to jump up in surprise and look up from the newspaper to see Sid and Rick standing by his side.

"Boss wants a word," Rick announced nodding his head.

"There you go." Dick placed the pint of lager on the bar beside Mark. Dick glanced at the three men and sensing trouble, he mumbled something about changing the beer barrels and quickly retreated into the backroom.

"Oh, OK," Mark replied calmly folding the newspaper and placing it on the bar. He knew that this was not an invitation he

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

could refuse. When you got a summons like this from Reggie, it was serious.

"I'll . . . er . . . I'll just finish my beer." Mark picked up the pint glass and placed the beer to his lips then threw the glass at Sid, punched Rick in the face and bolted for the door to the car park.

As Mark charged through the swing door, he found himself face to face with Reggie who was holding a baseball bat with his right hand while cradling it with his left.

"Hello, Mark." Reggie grins menacingly.

"Reggie! I . . . I . . ." Mark stammers.

Sid strides up behind Mark and whacks him on the back of the head with the handle of a pistol. Mark crumples to the ground.



When Mark wakes, he is sitting, tied to a wooden chair in a barn with water running down his face. The left half of his face is covered in dried blood from the wound on his head caused by Sid's pistol. Reggie is sitting on another wooden chair in front of him cradling an AK47 in his arms. Three more of the rifles are sitting in a crate behind Reggie along with a large metal box full of ammunition. Mark pulls at the plastic cable ties holding his wrists to the chair and looks around the barn for a possible way of escape. Jack is standing by the door nervously staring at his feet. Sid is standing on Mark's left and Rick is standing on Mark's right with a jug in his hand. Mark notices that Rick has a plaster over his left eye.

"He's coming around, Boss," said Rick.

"Jack, you wait outside," Reggie ordered.

Jack kicks his feet and makes a show of reluctantly exiting the barn door.

Reggie waits for the barn door to swing shut and then returns his gaze to Mark.

"Who put him up to it?" Reggie demanded menacingly.

"I dunno Boss, honest. You know Gazza. When he gets an idea in 'is head . . ." Mark tried to reason with Reggie.

Reggie smashes the butt of the rifle onto Mark's nose shattering the bone and Mark lets out a shriek.

"Watch your f _ _ _ ing mouth. That's my baby brother you're talking about." Reggie bellowed angrily.

Mark tries to speak but spits out blood onto the floor.

"All I know is . . . is that Davy was gonna do the drivin' for 'im." Mark offered all the information he knew. He knew that he had to offer Reggie something or he was a dead man.

Reggie grabs a handful of Mark's hair to pull his head up and then glares into his face.

"Yeah, and where's Davy now?" Reggie demanded.

"I . . . I swear I dunno, Boss." Mark tried to look Reggie in the eye to prove he was telling the truth but the blood from his broken nose was filling his eyes.

"Well you're no f _ _ _ ing use to me then, are you?" Reggie stands up, cocks the rifle and points it at Mark.

"No, please, Boss. He's got a girl in Peckham, lives in a flat on the Queen's Road, that's all I know. A teacher or something. I jus' gave 'im the gun, Boss, honest." Mark pleaded. "It was Davy who left him at the bank . . . " He knew by saying this he was signing David's death warrant, but he hoped that he could divert Reggie's rage onto David and save his own life.

From outside the barn, Jack could hear everything. Jack knew he had to warn Kathy and tell Kathy to warn David.

Jack pulled his mobile phone out of his pocket and texted Kathy:

'Tell Davy get out of town FAST. Reggie coming for him. Reggie knows where you live. DELETE THIS MESSAGE.'

Back inside the barn Reggie, lowered the rifle as he thought about what Mark had said. Finally, he spoke.

"Davy will answer for what he's done don't you worry about that but you, you bastard, you put a shooter in Gazzza's hands. You may as well have shot him yourself." Barked Reggie.

Boss please, I don't wanna die!" Mark spat out a final plea for mercy.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

Reggie brought the rifle back up to aim at Mark. "No, I expect you don't, but then neither did Gazza, did he?"

Reggie pulled the trigger.

"NO . . ." Screamed Mark.

The explosive clatter of the rifle fills the air as Mark catches the full force of the bullets in his chest which sends him flying backward into the wall still tied to the chair. The barn is filled with smoke.

"Woah, now that was LOUD!" exclaimed Vicious putting a finger in his ear and checking it to see if there was any blood on it.

"Jack, get yourself in here." Reggie barked.

Jack entered the barn looking scared.

"Right you two, get rid," said Reggie motioning to Jack and Rick the bloodied lifeless body of Mark now lying on the floor still tied to the chair.

"And someone find me Davy. He f _ _ _ ing deserted Gazza at the bank." Reggie demanded as he exited with the barn door slamming behind him. The three men stood staring at each other in silence. Suddenly Reggie popped his head back in through the door.

"Today, please gents!" Barked Reggie. "Oh, and Vicious, get rid of the shooters. You get ten years just for possession of those things!"



Across town, Kathy is in the playground supervising the children when her mobile phone buzzes and vibrates in her pocket. She pulls her phone out and reads the text.

"Rachel, can you look after the kids for a few minutes, I need to make an urgent call?" Kathy asks her colleague.

"No problem, Kathy, but don't go too far. These kids can be a bit of a handful at times." Rachel replied.

Kathy went behind the wall and opened the text message. She read it, then read it again and then deleted it. Then she scrolled her phone to David's number and dialed.

The British Jihadist

Inverness, Scotland

Thomas Wright lived in a rundown apartment building at 'The Ferry' in Inverness. He lived on his own in the three-bedroom flat since his flatmates moved out not long after his conversion to Islam. Since his conversion, he went by the name of Mustafa Al Britani. Mustafa was a small man, thirty-one years old with a thick mop of red hair. He had left home at fifteen when his drunken father beat him so badly that he had almost lost an eye. That beating left two indelible marks on his life; his left eye was slightly crooked, and he never touched alcohol. He had few friends and had never had a serious girlfriend. He had moved to Inverness from Glasgow when the government placed him in a job creation scheme for long-term unemployed young people and sent him to work in the Scottish national parks. He had worked for three years in the parks and enjoyed it but after his conversion, he started getting into rows with his bosses over the amount of time he spent praying. Despite several meetings with Park management to find an amicable solution, he was not willing to compromise his faith and he was therefore fired. He had been unemployed now for six months.

Mustafa was sitting on the threadbare carpet in his sparsely furnished living room. He kept the curtains permanently drawn to avoid attention from the nosy neighbors which kept the flat in a state of constant eerie semi-darkness. The only furniture was a computer desk, on which sat a laptop, a swivel chair, and a large screen TV in front of which Mustafa was now sat cross-legged

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

on the carpet playing the video game 'Medal of Honor' on-line in multi-player mode.

He knew 'The Wolf,' his opponent was good as he had played him several times and almost always lost. The Wolf claimed that he was in Al Raqqa, Syria and was a real Jihadist and Mustafa believed him. They had never met or seen each other and communicated only through the game. The Wolf was playing the role of the Insurgent Taliban and Mustafa was the American Ranger in 'Operation Enduring Freedom, the War in Afghanistan'.

On the screen, the turbaned Taliban insurgent fires a rocket at the American Chinook helicopter flying low overhead. The rocket whooshes through the air leaving a trail of white smoke and hits the tail of the helicopter causing it to spin, trailing circles of black smoke as it spiraled downwards. Standing at the loading door of the helicopter, the American Ranger sees the insurgent standing at the front door of a partially destroyed house. He fires his M16 assault rifle at the insurgent but narrowly misses, the bullets shattering the plaster of the doorway. The insurgent fires back but only fires two shots before he runs out of bullets. The insurgent drops the rifle and ducks into the house. The helicopter makes a hard landing in the field next to the house and the American Ranger charges out and rushes into the house in pursuit. Inside the house, all is quiet and the bright sunlight streams through the broken windows illuminating the dust flying in the air and creating strong contrasting shadows. The Ranger moves through the house slowly and carefully with his rifle pointed in front of him and his finger on the trigger. He enters the kitchen area. The curtains on the broken window are blowing in the wind. Suddenly he notices the shadow of the insurgent on the floor in front of him. As he swings around, he hears the shout of 'Allahu Akbar'¹ and turns just in time to see the insurgent pull the cord on his suicide vest as the scene fills with the resulting explosion.

"That's cheating!" Mustafa complained. "You killed yourself too!" he noted.

1. Allahu Akbar is an Islamic phrase in Arabic called Takbir in Arabic meaning: Allah is the greatest.

“That is not cheating, that is true Jihad,² brother!” Admonished the Wolf in a friendly tone. “For a true Shaheed,³ Istishhad⁴ is the true path. We respawn in Jannah!”⁵

The Wolf now changed his tone to a more serious one as he asked. “And when will you do your Jihad, brother?”

Mustafa shifted his position on the carpet uncomfortably and kept silent.

“You do not want to fight for the Ummah?” asked The Wolf.

“You want ME, to come to Syria?” Asked Mustafa incredulously. “I’ve never been outta Scotland me and I don’t even have a passport!”

“You do not need to come to Syria to do Jihad, the kafir are all around you, my brother. See how corrupt they are. The infidel crusaders invade our lands, stealing our oil and slaughtering our people. Their women dress and speak like whores. They have made homosexuality lawful in their lands and even their churches now have homosexual priests. This is grievous haram,⁶ brother and forbidden in Sharia. Surely it is clear to you that Allah has confounded them and turned their lands over to the Ummah. Now is the time to strike, brother. Now is the time to take their land for Allah.” The Wolf made his speech passionately.

“I know all these things.” Replied Mustafa. “But what can I do?”

“When will you do your Jihad?” The Wolf asked him for the second time.

“Soon,” Mustafa replied vaguely.

“Do you not want to be Shaheed for Allah?” asked The Wolf incredulously.

2. Jihad is an Arabic word meaning: to struggle or fight against the enemies of Islam.

3. Shaheed from the Quranic Arabic word meaning: witness or martyr.

4. Istishhad is the Arabic word meaning: martyrdom.

5. Jannah is a Quranic word literally meaning: garden but figuratively heaven.

6. Haram is an Arabic term meaning forbidden.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

“Of course, of course I do,” replied Mustafa defensively. “But what can I do, IN SCOTLAND?”

“There may be a way . . .” replied The Wolf more calmly. “. . . for one who is a TRUE Muslim,” he emphasized.

“I am listening, brother,” Mustafa replied assertively.

“You will need some ‘equipment,’” replied The Wolf. “This advertisement has just appeared on the Darknet.” The Wolf sent him a link. “May be you and your brothers can buy these ‘tools’ and put them to the service of Allah.”

“I don’t know anything about no Darknet. How would I even get on?” Asked Mustafa.

“I am sending you the code to upload the Darknet. Salaam, brother.” Informed The Wolf.

“OK . . . I will look. Salaam brother!” Replied Mustafa.

The Wolf had already logged out of the game.

Mustafa logs out of the game, stands up and goes to the computer desk, sits down in the chair and opens his laptop computer. He uploads the code that the Wolf sent him, and the computer opens up a new browser. He then clicks on the web link that The Wolf sent him, and the browser opens up a website called ‘Global Guns’ on a page with an offer of four Kalashnikov rifles with over one thousand rounds of ammunition for only thirty Bitcoins.

“Bitcoins? What is a Bitcoin?” Mustafa asked himself.

New Scotland Yard

London, England

It is 3:00 PM the day after the robbery and Liz and Mick are standing in uniform in front of Chief Inspector Jack Davis of the Metropolitan police who is seated at his desk on the top floor of the offices of New Scotland Yard in London. Liz has two small plasters on her face covering cuts from the flying glass of the shattered windows of the ARV.

The Chief continued. "Of course, as usual with all police shooting incidents, we have reported the incident to the IPCC and as a precautionary measure, you are both removed from ARV duty effective immediately. You will both be assigned other duties. Dismissed!"

Mick nodded, turned and marched off out of the room but Liz stood her ground.

"Sir, is that really necessary?" Liz demanded. "I did not shoot."

"I am aware of that, Sergeant McCracken." The Chief replied. "In fact, that is no small cause of concern to me." The Chief referred to the report on his desk. "I understand that you were in direct line of fire with the suspect and that it was you that shouted the warning although you did not fire when he turned his gun on you, correct?"

"It wasn't like that Sir, there was only a brief second," Liz replied confidently.

"Brief second or not, your action, or lack thereof, could have cost your life and the lives of your fellow officers." The Chief retorted.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

The Chief pointed to her personnel file on his desk. "You are a fine officer McCracken and judging from your file, a first-rate marksman."

The Chief continued picking up a thick book on his desk. "Now, according to Metropolitan Police guidelines and regulations, I should have you removed from active duty for a period of not less than four weeks, during which time you should undergo an assessment by the police psychologist and be retrained on the firearms course. But I'm not going to do that. I believe that everyone is allowed a second chance and I'm not going to let one incident mar the career of a fine officer. Of course, this incident will have to go on file, and I cannot put you back on ARV's until the IPCC have completed their investigation. However, I have decided in this case another course of action to be most appropriate. And that is only because I need you for an assignment."

"Sir?"

"The deceased robber has been positively identified as one Gary Mitchell. I understand that you are familiar with the Mitchell Gang, Yes?" Asked the Chief.

"Yes Sir, as a beat officer they were on my patch. But they are career criminals not cowboy stuff like this. The gang leader, Reginald Mitchell, the deceased's brother, is a real piece of work, known for extreme violence but he's a professional. He's old school gangster with principles, you know, no women, no kids that sort of stuff. The rest of the gang are just hangers-on and most of them have convictions. But not Reginald. He's too smart to be involved in something like this." Liz informed.

"Yes, well that's as maybe but intelligence received today has revealed that the gun used in the robbery was indeed bought by one of the Mitchell gang. In addition, a series of intercepted messages sent by one of the gang reveals that there are several more of these weapons and that they are being offered for sale on the internet or rather the so-called 'Darknet'. And of course, after yesterday's incident, we would expect them to be looking to offload the guns at the earliest possible opportunity. Now, I have just learned in the last hour that they will likely be bought by an unknown person or

persons in the north of Scotland. And, if this deal goes through as we expect it to, then one or more of the gang will likely travel to Scotland in the next day or two to make the drop.”

“So, you want me to lead a raid on the Mitchells to recover the guns before they leave for Scotland, Sir?” Anticipated Liz.

“No, as much as I’d like to see the Mitchell gang behind bars, we have bigger fish to fry so to speak. Our friends at MI5 have indicated that there could be a terrorist plot in the making north of the border and these guns could be part of that plot. Your new assignment is to follow the guns and find out who buys them and for what purpose. You are to be on temporary secondment to the Firearms Unit of Police Scotland. You are to report to Commander Morrison of Police Scotland in Inverness as soon as you arrive.”

“Sir . . . ?” Liz could not quite believe what she was hearing.

“That’s the job, McCracken. It’s that or pushing paper around this office for the next month at least.”

“I’ll get on it right away, Sir.” Liz beamed as she saluted the chief.

“Yes, I thought so.” The chief remarked. “Well, what are you waiting for? Dismissed!”

Bitcoins and Bullets

Inverness, Scotland

As-Salaam Alaikum my brothers!” Cried Mustafa as he answered the knock at the door to find Jamal and the Malik brothers.

“Wa-Alaikum-Salaam.” Jamal and the brothers responded in unison.

“Come in, come in!” said Mustafa as he hugged each one with the one-armed hug as they came through the door.

“You will not believe how Allah, the most merciful, has blessed us.” He continued excitedly.

Mustafa checked outside the door to the left and the right assuring himself that they were not followed before closing the door.

They entered the living room and sat themselves down on the carpet.

“You know that I said that I had made contact on the ‘Dark-net’ with a brother in Syria.” Began Mustafa.

“Indeed brother.” Replied Jamal. “What news do you have for us?”

“Well, he has found someone who will sell us guns!” Replied Mustafa excitedly. “Four of them to be precise, and plenty of bullets.” He added.

“Masha’ Allah!” cried Yousef.

“Hamdullah!¹ He has answered our prayers.” Responded Jamal raising his right index finger. “With guns, we can make a

1. Hamdullah is an Arabic phrase meaning: praise be to Allah

real Mumbai!² We will all be Shaheed brothers! Allahu Akbar!” he added excitedly.

“Allahu Akbar!” the others responded in chorus.

“We can have them next week,” continued Mustafa. “We only need to pay thirty Bitcoins.” He added matter-of-factly.

Suddenly there was silence.

“What is a Bitcoin?” asked Afzal.

“That is the beauty of this deal my young friend,” explained Mustafa. “Bitcoins are digital, untraceable, better than cash.”

“And how do we acquire these Bitcoins?” asked Jamal.

“We can buy them online,” Mustafa replied.

“How much?” asked Afzal.

“About £300,” replied Mustafa. “Each,” he added helpfully.

“What! And we need thirty? Where can we get . . . £9,000 from?” asked Afzal quickly doing the math. “We don’t even have jobs.”

“Almighty Allah will provide. He wills it,” Mustafa declared.

“I can get the Bitcoins,” Yousef declared flatly.

“You can get thirty Bitcoins?” asked Jamal turning to Yousef.

“I know our father has many Bitcoins that some brothers and sisters donated for fixing up the mosque,” replied Yousef.

“Our father will never give them to us to buy guns,” Afzal responded.

Our father does not have to know. I know where he keeps the codes. The codes are all we need,” responded Yousef confidently.

“We cannot steal from our father, Yousef!” cried Afzal.

“We would not be stealing him, my brother.” We will be using them for the cause of Allah for which they were intended.” Yousef assured him.

“Our cause is more worthy,” agreed Jamal nodding emphatically. “Are you sure that you can get the codes brother?” Jamal asked turning to Yousef.

“I am sure, and father will not know,” Yousef replied turning to Afzal.

2. Referring to the 2008 Mumbai, India Islamic terrorist attacks which killed 166 people.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

“Then we are in agreement,” said Mustafa. “I will make the deal today.”

A Wake-Up Call

Inverness, Scotland

David is sitting at the table in the window of the Eden café again waiting for Roy with the New Testament open on the table in front of him to the book of Acts of the Apostles. It is cold outside and the low, gray clouds are completely obscuring the sun and threatening to bring more rain. People are passing by, wrapped up in winter coats and thick, woolen hats and scarves. He watches a young couple pass by, laughing, hand in hand, oblivious to the cold. While he is waiting, he decides to take his mobile phone out of his pocket. He searches through his phone contacts trying to picture the faces. He pauses on Kathy's number and his finger caresses her photo smiling back at him from the contact details. He is tempted to call her. He misses hearing her voice, but he knows it is too soon and doesn't want to put her in any more danger. He knew that they would probably still be watching her. They wouldn't touch her because of Reggie's gentleman gangster code of honor, but they would be watching her. He remembered the last time he had heard her voice.



David was laying low in his top floor flat in an apartment building in the East-end of London. Yesterday's bank robbery was all over the news on the television. David was sitting on his luxury leather couch flicking through the channels on his big screen TV when his mobile rang on the coffee table in front of him. The photo displayed on the mobile phone announced it was Kathy calling.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

"Hey, Babe," David answered.

"David, something bad has happened, you've got to get out of London. You've got to go now." Kathy sounded really urgent and very upset.

"Hey, slow down Babe," David reassured her. "What's the problem?"

"It's Reggie. I think he's gone mad. I got a text from Jack. It said to warn you that Reggie is coming for you . . ." Kathy blurted everything out.

"Gazza's dead, I know, I saw it on the news," said David. "I waited as long as I could at the bank, but he didn't show. What exactly did Mark's message say?"

"Not much, he said for you to get out of town as Reggie was coming for you. He told me to delete the message. I think Reggie blames you for what happened to Gazza. I heard that your mate Mark is dead, and that Reggie killed him. You need to go, David. Oh, David, I'm so scared." Kathy replied through her tears.

"Hey, don't worry Babe," David reassured her. "Reggie may be a tough east-end gangster, but he has his code of honor. Everyone knows that he never touches women or kids. They won't touch you; I promise. Ask your mate Rachel to stay over for a couple of days if it'll make you feel better. If they come to see you, act like you don't know anything and just tell them where I live."

"But David . . . they might kill you." Kathy sounded really concerned and was crying again.

"Don't worry for me Babe, I'll be long gone." David decided as he tried to reassure her. "I'll call you in a few weeks or so when the dust settles."

A school bell sounded on Kathy's end of the line informing her that break time was over.

"I got to go now David, look, please take care. Oh, I wish you hadn't taken that stupid job." Kathy lamented.

"You and me both." Admitted David. "But don't worry Babe, everything's going to be alright; I promise."

"Don't forget to call me." She cried. "I need to know you are OK."

"I will Babe; I promise." He comforted her." Now go now."

"OK, bye." She whispered.

"Bye, Babe." He responded softly. And she hung up.



David was still staring at the photo on his mobile phone when Roy arrived.

"Daydreaming?" Said Roy as he arrived at David's table, offering his hand to David.

"Oh, yeah, miles away." Said David sliding the mobile back into his pocket and rising to shake Roy's hand.

"So how you doing?" Asked Roy as they both sit down.

"Fine, OK I guess." Answered David.

"And how's the reading going?" Roy nodded to the New Testament on the table.

"Finished the Gospels last night," said David. "So now are you going to tell me how I've been murdered and how that relates to this book?"

"OK, but how about first you tell me what the Gospel stories are about?" Asked Roy.

"Well, they all have the story of Christ, who claims to be the Son of the God of Israel, going 'round preaching to the people and doing miracles and ends with his crucifixion and finally his resurrection," said David.

"And did the four Gospels all tell the same story?" asked Roy.

"Yes, well mostly although there did seem to be some differences." Answered David.

"Do you know why that is?" asked Roy.

"No idea," David admitted flatly.

"Well, it's important to know that because that is one of the criticisms of the Bible for those that don't want to accept the truth. However, it is simple to explain; you see the writers of the Gospels are witnesses and like witnesses to any event, they see things from different perspectives. However, having said that, their combined testimonies do not contradict each other but rather complement

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

each other and complete the whole picture. Do you follow me?" asked Roy.

"Yes, I can see that." David agreed.

"So, what else did you notice?" asked Roy.

"Well, he said that whoever believes in him will have eternal life," said David.

"Right, and so the account of the Gospels is the God of the Bible's revelation of his only born Son to the world and through his sacrifice for our sin and his resurrection is our assurance of eternal life. Would you agree with that summing up of the Gospels?" Asked Roy.

"Yes, I think I would agree with that," said David.

"Ok, so now in the Gospel of John, Jesus said: 'You will die in your sins if you do not believe I AM'. Jesus said the I AM many times in the New Testament most notably in the Gospel of Mark in answer to the High Priest's question if Jesus was the Son of God. The I AM is a title of the Elohim or God in the Old Testament and the High Priest knew that and so they had him crucified by the Romans for blasphemy. You see that even though there is one God, God is not one. He is infinitely much more than that. The Gospels reveal that what Christ was telling us is that he is part of the Elohim as the Son of God and he had been sent by the Father to offer the way of salvation to mankind. He gave us ample proof in both in words and deeds and if we refuse to believe he is the Son of God we will die in our sins and be judged because of them. If we believe in Jesus, then he takes away our sins and we are born again. God so loved the world that he sent his Only Born Son to die for us to show us the way to eternal life. Can you comprehend a love like that? The love of the all-powerful Father to offer his only born Son to die for people who rejected and hated him. And the love of the Son to give his life as a ransom for everyone who believes. Do you follow me?" asked Roy.

"Yes, ok so far," said David.

"Ok, as I told you before: you have been murdered. You see the devil's poison is sin. And this poison that the devil has given you has caused a terminal illness. And there is no known cure for

your illness. You are dying. You think you live in a free world, but you are in fact a slave, addicted to sin, a slave to sin so your freedom that you believe that you have is in reality just an illusion. And what is worse you are now so addicted to this poison you cannot see how dead you are. You are addicted to something that has in effect already killed you. You are now without hope. Your death is now certain. The only question is how long you have left." Roy let the words sink in before he continued.

David was very obviously stunned by what he was hearing but he kept his eyes focused on Roy and said nothing.

"That's the bad news," said Roy flatly. "But there is good news. God in his love, has provided an antidote for the death that you have in you. The antidote is in the blood of His Son Jesus Christ. Christ said, if you remember in the Gospel of John, that unless you drink his blood you have no life. We are of course talking spiritually here but you need to accept that Christ shed his blood for your sins. Indeed, the Bible tells us that without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins. In the Old Testament, this used to be done yearly on what the Israelites called the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur when they sacrificed an animal to atone for their sins. But that was not a permanent solution to sin and had to be performed every year. Christ's perfect self-sacrifice provides the atonement for all our sins once and for all." Roy paused again to let the words sink in.

David was sitting still with his arms crossed, his eyes on Roy and listening intently. Roy continued.

"You have been given free-will. The freedom to choose not to do evil; that is to reject sin. God does not want to make us slaves but willing servants and eventually his children, who choose life over death and choose to serve our God and Creator. But you have to willingly choose to reject sin. And for that, you need to know what sin is. Most people do not think that they are sinners because they don't know what sin is. Sin, the Bible tells us, is transgression of God's law. You have freedom to do whatever you want in the world. That is the life that God has given to everyone in this world. But if you want eternal life then you have to learn to live God's

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

way, without sin, to be prepared to live in his perfect, sinless, kingdom forever. Essentially, your life is your one chance to choose life over death. Righteous Law over unrighteous anarchy. God has given you the freedom and the understanding to choose. There is no other way and our time is always running out. God offers you eternal life without suffering, sickness or death. You only have to accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and give up what is not good for you; in effect, stop taking the poison.” Roy informed.

“But how?” asked David sitting up and unfolding his arms.

“Well, you need to understand what sin is and what it does to us. The Bible tells us the definition of sin is breaking God’s law and all sin is death. A Christian must learn to live without sin as there is no sin in the Kingdom of God neither can there be. Only ex-sinners will enter the Kingdom of God. Everything contrary to God’s law is sin and death. When you are ready, and I can help you, you will need to pray to God repenting of your past sins accepting that Christ died for your sins. Then you can be baptized into your new life with Christ. Then you can take communion with Christ which is bread and wine spiritually representing the body and blood of Christ and then you will follow Christ’s way of life as it is written in the New Testament. But you can begin by starting to follow God’s commandments.” Said Roy.

“You mean the ten commandments! That’s all Old Testament, isn’t it? Weren’t they nailed to the cross or something?” Asked David.

“No, it was your sin that was nailed to the cross in the body of our Savior Jesus Christ. And Christ told us that as long as heaven and earth stand, those laws stand. And as far as I know, both heaven and earth are still here.” Replied Roy.

“Are people still becoming Christians today, I mean it seems like a massive lifestyle change in this day and age.” Asked David.

“Aye, even in these cold times there are people still coming to Christ every day and it is not so massive a lifestyle change as you may think. You only need to be learning with the help of God to cut out the sin in your life, everything else you are free to choose. When we follow God’s Law of Life, God has promised to provide

all our needs, so you don't have to do anything immoral, illegal or unlawful. God's Law of Life is perfect. People generally don't like the law of the countries that they live in because well, for one; the law does not always seem fair, and two, they see that others don't obey the law so they figure why should they have to? And three, they feel the law is restrictive and stops people from doing what they want to, or what they think is good for them, or what they believe they should have the right to. But what if the law was fair? And what if everyone else also obeyed all laws? Would you still break the law if you knew for certain that the law was just and to break the law would result in your death? Would you not choose to live by the law then? Of course you would! Well, I am telling you that God's Law of Life is fair and perfect and good for us and it is life." Roy informed.

"I see, but do I have to become a Christian, can't I just turn over a new leaf, you know, start again?" Asked David.

"I am sorry but it's time for you to wake up to the fact that you have been murdered, David. The poison you have already taken will kill you. But you are not dead yet. You have one last chance. Jesus has offered you a way to survive; the only way to survive. All of us have free will to choose the way of death or the way of life. The only question remains is: Will you choose life, David?"

David remained quiet, thinking.

"Would you like me to pray for you, David?" Roy asked.

"NO!" David reacted and then realized that he had overreacted. "Sorry, I mean, no thanks, it's just I need some time to think about this."

They sat quietly for a minute sipping their coffees while David processed what he had heard. Then David notices a young man dressed in a worn tartan hoodie approach the table next to David and Roy where a couple of businessmen in suits are sitting and he overhears the young man ask them: "Any spare change, please, sir?"

One of the men waves his finger in the tartan hoodie's face and shakes his head without looking at him and continues his conversation with his colleague.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

"Have a good day, sir." The tartan hoodie replies respectfully and moves to David's table behind Roy.

"Any spare change, please, sir?" The tartan hoodie asks David.

Roy spins around on his chair to face the tartan hoodie.

"Hello John, and how are you today?" Roy asks the tartan hoodie offering his hand.

John was only seventeen years old but had already been living on the streets of Inverness for several years surviving by asking people politely for 'any spare change, please?' Most of the locals knew him if not by name then by his trademark tartan hoodie.

"Roy, my man, yeah I'm good and you?" John asks Roy shaking Roy's hand.

"I'm fine." Replies Roy. "Meet my friend David," Roy says. "John-David, David-John," Roy makes the introduction motioning his hand backward and forwards between the two men.

David shakes the hand that John offers. The hand was noticeably cold and hard. David suspected that his own hand felt warm and soft to John.

"Won't you join us for a coffee?" David asked glad of the distraction from what he considered was turning into a heavy conversation.

"No, you're all right." Replied John. "I never mix business with pleasure. Gotta do my rounds," he explained motioning his hand around the other tables in the bar. "Some other time, aye?"

"Yes," replied David.

"You just be careful of this man," John added smiling and placing his hand on Roy's left shoulder. "The stuff he says really makes sense. Almost made a believer out of me!"

"One day." Roy smiled, gently tapping the hand on his shoulder with his right hand. "God willing, one day."

"Aye, right." Replied John. "I'll be seeing you." John nodded to David before moving on to the next table.

Just then David's mobile beeped to notify receipt of a text message. David pulled his mobile out of his jacket pocket and read the message.

A WAKE-UP CALL

"I gotta get back to work," David announced wearily as he stood up.

"Ok, give me a call when you finish reading the New Testament and I'll tell you the rest of the story." Said Roy.

"Yeah, The New Testament." Said David scooping it up from the table and placing it in his jacket pocket. "I have to admit, it's a real eye-opener."

"Aye, it's a real eye-opener and more than that." Roy nodded and added. "It's a wake-up call."

The Darknet Deal

London, England

Sid turned on the bedside lamp, squinting his eyes in pain from the hangover. The light from the lamp revealed a saucer overflowing with cigarette butts on the bedside table. Sid tried focusing his eyes on his watch that he was still wearing. The time was precisely 3:00 AM. It was cold and dark in his tiny bedsit apartment and Sid had gone to bed wearing a sweatshirt and underpants. He found his jeans crumpled on the floor and pulled them on. He padded barefoot over to the kitchen area and lit a cigarette from the gas stove as he put the kettle on. He threw a spoon of instant coffee into a mug, added three spoons of sugar and a dollop of milk and then waited half a minute before lightly touching the side of the kettle and then, deciding it was hot enough, he poured the tepid water into the mug. He sat at the small dining table and opened up his laptop, the screen eerily illuminating his face in the dark. He checked his listing on the Darknet. There was a new message. The message was an offer from the same webmail address who had mailed him twice yesterday asking about the guns. He clicked on the file to open the encrypted message and read:

‘PRICE OK. BUT MUST BE DELIVERED TO
INVERNESS. BOD. DEAL?’

He thought about the offer and flicked the ash off of his cigarette onto a plate of unfinished food on the table. BOD meant that he would get the Bitcoin codes on delivery similar to the C.O.D. acronym for Cash On Delivery. Sid scratched his chin and weighed up his options. The idea of having to make the long trip up to

THE DARKNET DEAL

Scotland in the middle of winter while carrying illegal guns didn't much sound like his idea of fun. But then he did have his new Land Rover Discovery which he hadn't taken on a long drive yet and there wasn't much going on around here as Reggie was too pissed off to think up any new gigs. Besides, he hadn't had any other offers and he needed to get shot of the guns and fast. If Reggie found out that he still hadn't disposed of them he could share the same fate as Mark. He inhaled deeply on his cigarette, blew out a cloud of blue smoke and then typed:

'DEAL!'

Operation Titan

Inverness, Scotland

Liz arrived at the police station in Inverness in the rain, driving her own car, a white Toyota Corolla. The police station was a kind of gray, non-descript, concrete block office type building with a secure car park at the rear. She pulled up at the main gate, lowered the driver's window and produced her police identity card as the guard on the gate, dressed in a long trench coat, stepped out of his guard box to meet her.

"Hello, I'm here to meet D.I. Morrison." Liz announced.

"Just a minute Ma'am." The guard took her card into the guard box and picked up the telephone. Half a minute later he came back.

"Aye, that's ok Ma'am, just follow the route to the end of the car park and report to the reception through the blue double doors." The guard informed.

"Thanks." Liz took back her identity card with a nod and a formal smile.

The guard returned once more to the guard box and the gate opened electronically.

As Liz drove through the car park it started to rain more heavily. Parking the car as close as possible to the blue doors, Liz exited the car covering her head with her bag and dashed for the blue doors. Inside the doors, she entered into a reception area at the far end of which sat a uniformed officer behind a glass screen. Liz was immediately approached by a scruffy looking man in his early thirties dressed in a sweatshirt and jeans.

"Sergeant McCracken?" the man asked Liz.

OPERATION TITAN

"Er, that's right," Liz replied warily, observing his casual clothes.

"Oh, don't you mind ma civvies." He replied following her gaze.

"Sergeant Ferguson, . . . Angus." He continued offering his hand with a formal smile. "The D.I.'s expecting you. I'll take you up."

"Thank you." Replied Liz shaking hands with Angus.

Angus then nodded to the officer behind the glass on reception who buzzed them through, and a strong metal door swung open towards them.

D.I. Morrison, a large, smartly dressed man in his early fifties sat behind a large oak desk at the end of the corridor on the third floor. The door was partially open, but Angus knocked on the door regardless. D.I. Morrison was studying the contents of a thick red folder and looked up over the rim of his glasses.

"Sergeant McCracken, Sir," Angus announced.

"Good, send her in Angus." D.I. Morrison rose to his feet to greet Liz offering his hand.

"Welcome to the team, Sergeant McCracken. I'm Detective Inspector Morrison, just call me Gordon when the brass aren't around. We're an informal bunch here. You've met Angus of course." Gordon nodded to Angus.

"Yes Sir, thank you, Sir. It's Liz, Sir." Liz replied shaking Gordon's hand.

"Alright that's the pleasantries dispensed with; shall we get down to business?" Gordon motioned Liz to one of the chairs of the three-piece suite at the far end of the office.

"Thank you, Sir," Liz responded and sat.

Gordon sat in the other chair. "Angus, will you join us as well, please?"

"Aye," Angus replied closing the office door before taking his seat on the couch.

Gordon began the briefing.

"Well, let's see what we all have. We'll start with me. As you probably know, I'm heading up an anti-terrorist task force code

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

named 'Titan' based out of Inverness. The thing is, Intelligence has picked up some rather disturbing chatter leading us to have reason to believe that a terrorist attack is being planned right here in the city." Nodding to Liz he continued. "I heard from your D.I. Davies in the Met that you are trailing some weapons being delivered up here and the idea occurred that we could work together. We do not yet have any specific POI¹ and we're kind of hoping that your guns might lead us to our suspects. That's it in a nutshell, I'm afraid. Liz, what do you have?"

"We have a trace on the mobile signal of the supplier who should arrive in Inverness tonight. The supplier is a known member of a particularly nasty criminal gang from London that I am familiar with. We believe the weapons to be of the AK47 assault rifle type as one of the weapons was used in an attempted bank robbery in London last week and was recovered from the scene. We further believe that there are four remaining AK47's with an unknown quantity of ammunition currently in our supplier's possession and destined to be delivered to an unknown person or persons in the Inverness area." Liz contributed.

"Good, Angus?" Gordon prompted.

"As for our suspect militants, we are compiling a list of known Islamic radicals north of the border but so far we don't have any indication that any of them are involved in this. Our sources at MI5 lead us to believe that an attack is likely in its final planning stage and will most likely take place on or around Christmas day. Although we have no information of a specific target at the moment, we presume that it will be a 'Crowded Places' target similar to the recent attacks on the continent in Paris and Brussels." Angus added.

"That's a good starting point." Remarked Gordon.

"Now I would like you to work together on this reporting directly to me. We have a team of twelve highly trained AT officers at our disposal arriving tomorrow which we will divide into two teams of six. Each of you will head one team. In the meantime, Angus, see if you can find out anything from the 'word on

1. POI. Person (or persons) of Interest

OPERATION TITAN

the street' regarding Islamic militants in the area and follow up with intelligence on trying to pin down a probable location. Liz, if you can let us know more precisely when these guns are arriving, we'll put some plainclothes on watching them for the handover. It's important that we are all on the same page with this. I don't want to just get them with the guns. We need to have hard evidence that they are indeed planning an attack, so that means discreet surveillance. We don't want to spook them. Are we clear on that?" Gordon stressed.

"Aye." Angus nodded.

"Yes, Sir," Liz responded.

"Ok, let's get to it," Gordon concluded rising to his feet. "Liz, let me know if you need anything."

"Yes, Sir." Replied Liz rising to her feet.

"And not so much of the Sir, please Liz, you're not in London now." Gordon smiled pleasantly.

"Yes, S . . . Gordon." Replied Liz.

The Islamic Militant Plot

Inverness, Scotland

Jamal, Mustafa, Yousef, and Afzal are standing together in the ground floor food court of the Eastgate shopping mall in Inverness. Mustafa is the only one wearing Shalwar Kameez as the others are wearing their usual casual western clothes. They have planned to carry out the attack on shoppers inside the shopping mall on Boxing day because of the large crowds drawn to the post-Christmas sales. Jamal had for some time been talking about the possibility of them all going to Syria to become jihadists or even using knives in an attack in Scotland but that had been just talk and none of them really took it seriously. Now with these guns that Mustafa would get, that talk had suddenly become real and they saw this opportunity as a sign from Allah. They would now be respected jihadists. Last night at Mustafa's place they had worked out the details of the plan and how they would do the attack and now they were walking around the mall to familiarize themselves with the layout. Jamal was speaking.

"Yousef and Afzal, you will arrive on the first floor from the car park using the elevators at the end of the mall. You will drive the kafir to this end of the mall and down the escalators to this open area. You may need to fire a few shots to move them but don't waste all your bullets," he cautioned. "At the same time, Mustafa and I will enter the food court from each end of the mall on the ground floor and we will meet here where we will have all the kafir trapped, Insha'Allah. The British have a saying for this: 'Shooting fish in the barrel.'" Smiled Jamal.

"But what if we see any brothers among the kafir?" asked Yousef.

"Good question, brother. We ask them to recite the Shahada.¹ If they know the Shahada, then let them go. But if they do not know it then they are not our brother but kafir and we treat them not differently than the others. Agreed?" Jamal demanded.

The others nodded their agreement.

"And we do not surrender," Mustafa added excitedly raising his index finger on his right hand. "The path to Jannah is through Istishhad, brothers. Agreed?"

Just then, a text message announced its arrival on Mustafa's mobile phone. Pulling it out of his pocket he noticed that the text was from an 'unknown number' and it read simply:

'One hour.'

"This is it, my brothers. He is here!" Mustafa announced excitedly. "I must go, I have to change my clothes first and then meet him at the Loch."

"Hamdullah." Cried Jamal.

They were all smiling and hugging each other with the one-armed hug and congratulating Mustafa.

"Go, go!" they urged Mustafa as he sprang off towards the car park.



Nilofer is in a fashion jewelry shop at the Eastgate shopping mall with her friend Alison when she sees through the shop window her brothers walk past with Jamal and a short, pale-skinned red-haired man dressed in Shalwar Kameez whom she does not recognize. She continues watching as they stop and hug each other and then suddenly, the red-haired man runs off. Afzal turns towards her and she quickly hides behind the revolving display of silver earrings in the shop window. Then she watches as they walk towards the

1. The Shahada is an Islamic creed literally meaning the testimony which translates into English as: 'There is no god but Allah. Muhammad is the messenger of Allah'.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

escalator to the first floor. They laugh as Yousef points his finger like a pistol at a security guard in a white shirt who has his back to them as they pass.

Suddenly she feels a hand on her shoulder.

"What do you think of these?" asks Alison wearing a ridiculously large pair of earrings.

"Wha?" Nilofer nearly jumps out of her skin. "Oh my god, Ali! You almost give me a heart attack."

"Oh, sorry Nilo!" Alison offered sincerely to her best friend. "Ev'rything alright?"

"I dunno, Ali, I dunno." Replied Nilofer still a little shaken and hoping that what she had just seen didn't mean what she thought it meant.



Liz was in the assigned situation room when the call came in.

"Sargent McCracken," Liz spoke as she answered the telephone on the desk.

"There's a call from a young lady who wants to speak to someone about a serious crime she says she has information on. She sounds scared and has asked to speak to a female officer." The officer from the front desk announced. "I hope you don't mind but we don't have any other female officers in the station at the moment."

"That's fine," said Liz. "Please put her through."

"OK, you're through to Sargent McCracken." Liz heard the front desk officer announce to the caller.

There was a long silence.

"Hello . . . hello," Liz repeated.

"I can't hear anything. I'm going to hang up. If you can hear me, please call back." Liz advised.

"No . . . no, please do not hang up." Came the female voice on the other end of the phone.

"Can I help you?" Liz asked.

"Erm . . . look I'm not sure this is the right thing. May be I will call back." The voice hesitated and sounded nervous. Judging

THE ISLAMIC MILITANT PLOT

by the accent, Liz guessed the voice to belong to a young Asian woman.

“Hey, it’s no problem,” Liz assured the voice. “Please don’t worry, whatever you want to talk about is OK,” Liz said reassuringly.

“Can you protect my brother?” the voice asked.

The Drop

Loch Ness, Scotland

Sid parked his olive-green Land Rover Discovery at the agreed meeting place in a lay-by on the south side of Loch Ness on the little-used Old Military Road. The view was ‘pretty bloody spectacular’ he mused to himself as he lit a cigarette and rolled down the door window. It was a sunny afternoon but there was still a mist hanging over the Loch. Through the mist, he could make out a stunning castle on the north side of the Loch. Urquhart Castle was built in the 13th century. The castle’s claim to fame included that King David II of Scotland was said to have spent a summer there sometime in the 14th century and it had been the scenes of numerous battles over the years the latest being a Jacobite siege in the late 17th century. Today it is uninhabited, but it is still Scotland’s third most visited tourist attraction. However, this late in the year it gets few visitors and Sid can only see one solitary car in the carpark from across the Loch.

Suddenly an old, red Ford Escort pulls into the lay-by behind the Land Rover. Sid watches in his rear-view mirror as a red-haired young man dressed in jeans and a hoodie climbs out of the escort.

“Alright mate!” calls Mustafa to Sid striding up to the Land Rover.

Sid took a last deep draw of his cigarette and flicked the butt out of the window. He rolled up the window and steps out of the Land Rover.

“You picked a good spot for it; I’ll give you that.” Remarked Sid closing the door of the Land Rover.

"Saw it on google maps, looks even better in real life," Mustafa replied.

"Sid," said Sid, offering his hand to Mustafa.

"Thomas." Replied Mustafa and shook his hand.

"Now you ain't gonna be doin' anything daft with these things are ya?" asked Sid.

"Na, it's just me and some of the lads having a laugh. It's my mate's stag night see, and he loves guns, been in the army and all, anyway my mate Robbie's got a boat and we're all gonna go camping for the night on this uninhabited island we know and shoot up some targets." Mustafa lied as he had rehearsed.

"Well, whatever, but you don't know me, is that clear?" Sid waved a finger in Mustafa's face.

"Never seen you before." agreed Mustafa.

Sid grunted that he was satisfied with the reply and then checked up and down the road assuring himself that they were alone. Then he opened the back of the Land Rover and lifted a tarpaulin to reveal the guns. Mustafa reached out to take one.

"Ah, not so fast, Lad!" Said Sid replacing the cover over the guns. "Let's see the coins first, eh?" Sid demanded.

"Oh, right, yeah, sorry," Mustafa replied. He pulled a piece of folded paper from his pocket with a list of thirty alphanumeric lines of code.

"OK, let's check 'em," Sid demanded as he motioned for Mustafa to join him in the cab of the Land Rover. They both climbed into the Land Rover and shut the doors.

"Ok, let's have a look at that list," Sid demanded.

Mustafa handed over the piece of paper and Sid started punching in the first line of code on the list into his smartphone. Finally, the screen's display told him to wait while it checked the code. Sid glanced at Mustafa who tried not to look worried and rubbed his hands together.

"It's cold," Mustafa said, rubbing his hands together. It wasn't.

"Bling." The smartphone announced. The code was accepted.

"Alright." Announced Sid. "We're in business!"

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

Mustafa smiled reassuringly as Sid proceeded to enter the remaining twenty-nine lines of codes into the smartphone.

Having assured himself of the transfer Sid glanced over at Mustafa. He was a small young man he noticed. The thought crossed Sid's mind that he could easily 'whack him' and take the codes and the guns. Mustafa's smile on his face was beginning to fall as he began to understand what Sid was thinking. Then, suddenly Sid's face broke into a broad smile.

"OK, congratulations, the guns are yours." He announced. He had calculated that although he could get away with taking the codes without handing over the guns and the kid couldn't complain to anyone least of all the cops, he had remembered that he had to get rid of the guns anyway or Reggie would not be happy. 'Give the kid a break' he'd decided, charitably.

After transferring the guns and ammunition box into the Ford Escort, Sid shook Mustafa's hand once again, climbed into the Land Rover and drove away.

Across the loch, the solitary car in the carpark at Urquhart Castle, a white Toyota Corolla, also drove away.

Mustafa pulled out his mobile phone from his pocket and sent a text to Jamal:

'c u @ Masjid ☺'

The Hit

Inverness, Scotland

Sid was tired. It felt like it'd been a long day. He'd been driving since six o'clock this morning and although it was only half-past three in the afternoon, the sun was already beginning to set over Inverness. He drove the Land Rover back up the A82 towards the city and headed into the center to look for a hotel. Driving over Ness Bridge across the River Ness he spots the Tourist Information Centre on the right and pulls over into a loading only restricted parking bay. Inside the center, he approaches a young man, dressed in traditional Scottish clothes, seated behind a desk and asks for a hotel for the night. The man offers him the Best Western Inverness Palace Hotel and Spa, on the bank of the river Ness, two minutes' drive from the center and only a few minutes' walk into the city for the pubs, restaurants, and attractions. It's a bit pricey at £100 a night but with a free spa including sauna for all guests, Sid decides that he has earned himself a treat and tells the young man to book it for him.



Across the city, two plainclothes detectives are watching the old church through night vision binoculars mounted on a tripod at the window of a flat across the street. Mustafa arrives in his old Ford Escort. Jamal comes out to greet him and they exchange a one-armed hug and unload the contents from the rear door of the hatchback into the old church.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!



After spending an hour relaxing in the Spa, Sid decides to go out for a drink and strolls into the city center. Sitting in the window of the Kings Head pub with a refreshing pint of lager, he reflects on a job well done. Reggie would be satisfied that the guns were disposed of and he had a nice little sum tucked away in Bitcoins. He took another long draught of his cool beer as he watched the people wrapped up in woolen scarves and hats passing by.

Suddenly Sid chokes on his beer slamming the glass down onto the table and wiping his mouth with his hand as he thought to himself: "That looks like . . . Davy!"

He watched the man on the other side of the street as he walked past the pub under a streetlamp.

"That is Davy, he's even wearing that bloody Spurs cap!" He muttered to himself.

He left his half-finished pint and exited the pub following David.

Keeping a discreet distance, Sid reached into his pocket and pulled out his smartphone and called Reggie.

"This better be bloody well important at TEN O'CLOCK AT NIGHT!" Reggie's irritation at being disturbed was unmistakable.

"Boss, it's me, Sid." Sid introduced himself.

"Yeah, I thought it might be . . ." answered Reggie politely. ". . . CALLING ON SID'S F _ _ _ ING PHONE!" he bellowed sarcastically.

"Sorry Boss, but I..I thought you'd want to know. I just saw Davy." Sid offered apologetically.

"Davy, eh . . . You sure it's him?" Reggie asked, instantly becoming calmer.

"Two hundred percent Boss, I'm following him now," Sid informed.

"Where are you?" Reggie demanded.

"Inverness." Replied Sid. ". . . in Scotland," he added helpfully.

"I know where the f _ _ _ Inverness is Sid. I could ask what the f _ _ _ you are doing up there but never mind. Scotland eh. Well,

THE HIT

I ain't going up to Scotland in the middle of winter. You handle it, Sid." Reggie decided.

"You want that I bring 'im back to London with me, Boss?" Sid asked.

"No, I want you to *HANDLE IT*," Reggie emphasized for clarity of his order. He's gotta pay for what he did to Gazza. Don't you agree?" Reggie demanded calmly with a menacing undertone.

"Yeah, OK Boss," Sid answered resignedly. He knew what that meant.

"You tooled up?" Asked Reggie.

"Yeah, never leave home without it." Sid patted his trusty gmm Berretta Nano Pistol in his jacket pocket.

"Call me when it's done," Reggie demanded and hung up.



David turned right at the end of the High Street and headed up the old Market Brae Steps. It was late and cold, and the light rain blowing in the icy wind was stinging his face. There were few people about this late on a Tuesday night in the middle of winter. David hurried up the steps, his footsteps echoing off the ancient paving stones. The dark alleyway snaked left and right until he reached the top and entered the dimly lit Raining's Stairs carpark. Striding up to his van he took the key out of his coat pocket.

"Sorry, Davy!" A voice behind him declared as he felt what he knew was the cold barrel of a pistol to the back of his head. David slowly raised his hands.

"Click." The gun misfired. "Click, click." The gun continued to misfire.

"What the . . . !" muttered Sid.

David spun around on his heels and brought his fist up with full force onto Sid's nose resulting in a sickening crack. Sid fell backward, his arms flailing and blood pouring from his nose as the gun went flying through the air before clattering across the wet concrete and into the darkness.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

Lying on his back on the wet ground, Sid heard David get in the car and drive off, tires screeching. Sid struggled to his feet but could see nothing out of his watering eyes except a white van speeding away into the night.

The Tip-Off

Inverness, Scotland

It is 2:00 AM and Sid is walking towards his Land Rover in the floodlit carpark of the Raigmore hospital, Inverness. It is dark and cold and his breath leaves clouds of mist in the air. He has a large white plaster across the bridge of his nose and two bruised eyes. He gets into his Land Rover and starts the engine to warm the car. He pulls his mobile out of his jacket pocket and calls Reggie.

"Yeah." Reggie's voice answered.

"Boss, it's Sid again. He . . . er, got away." Sid admitted a little nervously.

"What do you mean, he got away?" Reggie asked incredulously.

"He bust my nose, Boss. I 'ad 'im bang to rights, Gun to 'is 'ead an' all. Three times I pulled the trigger and nothing. Must 'av misfired or somethin' weird. Never happened before. I checked me gun after, even fired off a round and its working fine. I don't understand it." Sid admitted.

"For f _ _ _'s sake." Reggie fumed. "I ask you to do a simple job and . . . I might as well do it myself. I'm coming up with the boys. Where are you staying?"

Sid struggled to quickly pull his wallet out of his back pocket while seated and then remove the hotel card. "Oh, it's ah . . . the Best Western Inverness Palace Hotel and Spa." He read aloud. "Number 8, Ness Walk. Inverness." He added helpfully.

"I'll find it!" Reggie grumbled. "You put the word out on the street up there. I want Davy found. There's a grand in it for whoever fingers him. Got it?" Reggie barked.

"Ok Boss," Sid replied.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

"So, what are you doing now?" Asked Reggie calmly.

"I'm sitting in the rover outside the hospital," Sid replied innocently.

"Well don't just sit there. MOVE YOUR ARSE!" Reggie shouted and then hung up.

"OK Boss," Sid replied to no one. He stuffed the phone into his jacket pocket and drove away.



David is sitting in his van on the shores of Loch Ness reading the New Testament. Although it is midday, the golden sun is low in the sky. The air is still, making the water on the loch as clear as glass, perfectly reflecting the great, white cumulonimbus clouds. He stops reading for a moment and looks at his watch. He then reaches into his jacket pocket and takes out his phone. Looking up Kathy's contact details, he hesitates, breathes a deep sigh, and then calls Kathy's mobile number.

"David!" Kathy's voice registered a mixture of surprise and relief.

"Hey, Babe, you ok?" David asked.

"Yeah, me, no problem. Rachel came to stay with me for a week like you suggested, and I saw some of the Mitchell guys hanging 'round for the first couple of days after you left but since then, nothing. They didn't even come to speak to me. Are you ok?" Kathy asked concerned.

"Yeah, I mean . . . I miss you and all." David admitted but wished he could tell her how much he really missed her.

"Can you come back? Do you think it's all over now?" Kathy asked.

"I don't think so. Reggie doesn't forget that easy and he certainly doesn't forgive." Said David rubbing the back of his head where the gun barrel had been last night.

"Then if you can't come to me, I'll come to you!" Kathy announced playfully.

"NO!" David snapped. Realizing his outburst, he mellowed his voice. "Sorry Babe, I mean I'd love to see you an' all but it's just not safe for you to be with me right now."

"David, what's going on? Has something happened?" Kathy understood there was something David wasn't telling her.

"It's nothing . . . it's just er . . ." David started then thought it best not to tell her.

"David, you can tell me, it's alright, whatever it is. We agreed, no secrets, right?" Kathy's voice was soothing but insistent.

"Oh, Kathy, you know, I've been talking to this fella about life and all and he's a Christian and what he says, well, it kinda makes sense. And I've been thinking about it and just when I think I'm starting to make sense of my life and everything, well, Sid, you know, Vicious, out of all people, suddenly appears out of nowhere in a carpark last night, puts a gun to the back of my head and pulls the trigger." David confessed.

"Oh, David!" Are you alright? Are you hurt? Tell me where you are, and I'll come and get you!" Kathy sounded alarmed.

"No, I'm not hurt, that's the weirdest thing. The gun didn't fire. Not once . . . three times!" Said David incredulously.

"David, you were almost killed!" Kathy was in shock.

"Yeah, almost killed - three times!" exclaimed David.

"So where is Sid now?" Asked Kathy.

"I dunno, I hit him as hard as I could and drove off," said David.

"David, you need to go to the police," Kathy urged. "They can protect you."

"I can't," David replied. "I can't tell them Sid tried to kill me because Reggie wants me dead because he blames me for his baby brother being shot dead by police because I was the getaway driver who left him while he was robbing a bank." Saying it all out loud made it seem even more unreal. David took a deep breath.

"Oh, yes, I see." Said Kathy as she realized the difficulty David was in.

"I can't come back to London and I can't stay here. They're bound to come looking for me again now they know where I am."

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

By saying it out loud, David was also starting to realize now the difficulty he was in.

"Can you go somewhere else?" Asked Kathy trying to be helpful.

"Where?" asked David gloomily.

"Anywhere, New York, Paris, Marbella . . . yes, Spain, that's where I've heard some people go when they are on the run. And the weather's nice too!" Kathy tried cheering David up.

"No, I'm tired of runnin', Babe, and I've got no money to speak of and besides, I quite like it up here," David confessed looking out over the loch.

"Well, you can't just wait for Reggie to show up on your doorstep one morning. Can't your friend help, that Christian fella you said about?" Kathy was racking her brain to think of a solution.

"Roy, yeah he's a good guy and what he says makes sense but I dunno how he could help with this," David replied.

"Can you trust him, I mean if you tell him what happened and all, can you trust him?" Asked Kathy.

"Yes . . . yes, I believe I can." Replied David. "Ok, I'll speak with him." David decided.

David heard Kathy breathe a sigh of relief, then he heard the school bell ringing in the background again.

"You know this has changed me, this whole thing and what Roy says, it's changed me," David spoke sincerely.

"Babe, I gotta go now," Kathy spoke softly. "Let's speak later. Call me tonight, OK?"

"I will," said David.

"Promise me?" Kathy asked.

"I promise," David promised.

"And stay safe!" Kathy warned.

"Don't worry, Babe. I'll call you tonight." David assured her.

"Ok, bye," Kathy spoke softly.

"Bye, Babe," David replied softly.

Kathy hung up.

David looked through the phones address book and pressed Roy's number.



It is only 4:00 PM but already quite dark when Liz drives her Toyota into the carpark of the bowling alley in Inverness. Liz had decided to wear her most casual clothes so as not to 'spook' her informant. She was wearing jeans and an elegant turquoise tartan polo neck jumper that she'd bought from the 'The Ness Shop' in the Eastgate Shopping mall in Inverness.

Nilofer and her best friend Alison were sitting at a table inside the bowling alley drinking mugs of hot chocolate.

"Do you think that's her?" Alison asked Nilofer as they watched Liz enter the bowling alley.

"I dunno." Answered Nilofer quietly.

"Nilo, you know, you don't have to go through with this," Alison told Nilofer softly as she put her hand on Nilofer's hand on the table.

"That is the problem." Replied Nilofer turning to Alison and forcing a smile. "I do."

Liz approached their table.

"Hello." Said Liz smiling. "I'm here to see Jennifer Lopez." She said somewhat embarrassed by the name she had been given by the young woman on the telephone.

"Yeah, that's me." Answered Nilofer.

"Do you want me to stay?" Alison asked Nilofer.

"No, it's ok, Ali. See you later at uni." Nilofer replied and squeezed Alison's hand as Alison got up, picked up her bag and left the table.

"May I sit down?" asked Liz motioning to the chair vacated by Alison.

"Yes, sorry, of course." Replied Nilofer.

"It's a nice place, do you come here often?" said Liz as she sat at the table slightly embarrassed again that she sounded so corny.

"How do I know I can trust you?" asked Nilofer flatly.

Liz produced the 'proffer letter' that they had spoken about on the telephone which offered immunity from prosecution for informants. She handed it to Nilofer.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

"It's all there as we agreed." Said Liz. "Of course, we would need to add your real name to make this legal assuming you are not really 'Jenny from the block,'" Liz added with a kind smile.

Nilofer read the contents of the one-page document.

"And any information you give me will be treated in the strictest confidence. No one will know who gave me the information." Liz reassured her.

"And you can protect my brother?" Added Nilofer.

"If he hasn't actually committed any crime, he will not be charged," Liz replied.

"But you can protect him, right?" Demanded Nilofer.

"You said your brother is seventeen, is that correct?" Liz asked.

"Yes, seventeen." Replied Nilofer.

"We can take him into protective custody, if that's what you want." Replied Liz. "And we can hold him for up to three days. And in that time, we can arrest the other members of the gang that you spoke about."

"Yes, protective custody sounds good." Agreed Nilofer. "Only for three days, yes?"

"Yes, a maximum of three days. It's the law," admitted Liz.

"And you WILL arrest the others?" Confirmed Nilofer.

"As soon as we have the information that we need to make an arrest, we will pick up your brother and take him into protective custody and then arrest the other members of the gang." Liz spelled it out.

"Then it is agreed." Nilofer breathed a sigh of relief. "Where do we start?"

The Confession

Inverness, Scotland

Roy is handing out leaflets to passers-by outside the café Eden when David arrives. David stops and watches as an old man in a long gray Mackintosh coat walks past Roy and takes a leaflet but then stops and turns back to Roy.

“What’s this supposed ta mean?” The old man asked gruffly, waving the leaflet in Roy’s face.

“It means, my friend, that the devil has tricked you and because of that you will die but the gift of God is eternal life through our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” Roy smiled as he continued handing out leaflets.

“That’s a load of non-sense, that is. You people ought to get a proper job, filling folks heads with nonsense like that.” The old man remarked.

“You don’t have to accept it, my friend. Eternal life is a gift for those that believe and trust in God.” Said Roy.

“So, let me get this right, all I have to do is believe in this sky fairy of yours, and I get to live forever, is that about right?” Sneered the old man.

“You have to believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins and repent.” Informed Roy.

“I’ve not done any sins, me.” Replied the old man indignantly.

“Never told a lie?” Roy asked.

“Aye, and who hasn’t?” Replied the old man defensively.

“Indeed, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God,” Roy replied quoting scripture.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

"There you go again with your god-talk. I ain't buying it!" The old man replied turning around making a show of crumpling the leaflet in his hand and dropping it in a litter bin as he shuffled away.

Roy notices David is now standing next to him looking a bit bewildered by the encounter.

"Ah, don't mind old Alec, David. Not everyone accepts the good news so gracefully." Said Roy stuffing the remainder of his leaflets back into his rucksack.

"The Word of God is painful for many people. It's like being born. Babies don't want to leave the comfort and safety of their mother and it can be a great shock when they do. They often enter into the world kicking and screaming and it is the same with the new birth. But don't you worry, he'll be back. Anyway, how are you, David?" Asked Roy offering his hand.

"OK." Said David stretching the truth a little as he shook Roy's hand.

They enter the café and Roy approaches the usual table in the window.

"You don't mind?" David asks a little embarrassed motioning to the table at the back of the café. He figured the last place he should be right now is seen sitting in the window of a café in the middle of Inverness.

"Aye, no bother," Roy replies and they both sat down at the table at the back of the café.

David places the New Testament that he's been carrying around with him on the table in front of him and the waitress approaches. They order two large coffees and the waitress smiles sweetly and goes off to get them.

"So, what do you think?" asked Roy nodding to the New Testament in front of David.

"It's got me asking a lot of questions," admitted David.

"And . . . ?" prompted Roy.

"And I believe . . ." David nodded. ". . . at least I believe that I want to believe . . . God help me." He added. "In a strange but

THE CONFESSION

somehow comfortable way it all makes sense, right? I mean the salvation of mankind, the love of God, the sacrifice.”

“Indeed it does.” Said Roy.

David thought for a moment and then spoke.

“Roy, I’ve done some stuff . . .” David started. “Stuff that I’m not proud of . . . but I guess I gotta tell you.”

“You don’t have to tell me anything, but if it helps, I’ll listen,” Roy replies.

David looks around the café to make sure no one is listening to them.

“Look, I never believed in God and I still don’t know if I do now. I know I want to believe. No one in my family ever even went to church let alone read the New Testament. I always thought that I was not any worse than the next guy and a lot better than some of them. I always tried to do the right thing but that doesn’t always work,” said David.

“No, it doesn’t.” Agreed Roy.

“The point is, if this book is right,” continued David, placing his forefinger on the New Testament, “then I am far from living a godly life and I’m heading straight to hell and so is just about everyone I know. This book says repent and believe, well I do repent. I regret all the sin in my life, and I want to believe. I want to turn my life around and make a new start but now there’s two men dead because of me. I didn’t kill them, but I got involved with a gang of criminals and now those men are dead and the rest of the gang . . . well, they’re coming for me.” David exhaled deeply and felt some relief that he had confided in someone else.

“I see,” said Roy nodding and rubbing his chin.

“I came here to Inverness to see if I could make a fresh start.” David continued. “But somehow they’ve found me here, I don’t know how but they are here, and they are trying to kill me, and they are not going to stop until I’m dead, and maybe, well maybe that’s for the best . . .”

“No, no, David, we have all committed sins worthy of death, but I don’t believe that your time is now,” Roy spoke confidently. “But I do think you’re ready,” he added.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

“Ready? Ready for what?” Asked David wearily.

“To know the whole story.” Replied Roy smiling reassuringly.

“Not another book?” asked David, forcing a smile.

“Well if you want to really get to know God, then you should read the Old Testament too and I really do recommend that you do. But as you are in need of salvation now, that can wait for the moment.” Said Roy. “No, what I’m about to tell you now is the rest of the story of God, his plan of salvation and the key for understanding the meaning of life,” Roy stated.

David adjusted his seat, fixed his gaze on Roy and drew a deep breath.

“Ok, I’m listening,” said David.

“So, now you have read the whole of the New Testament?”

Asked Roy.

“Yes, I have.” Said David emphatically.

“OK, after the four Gospels witnessing the life of Christ, we have the Book of Acts or Acts of the Apostles as some call it and then several letters by various authors and finally the Book of Revelation when God reveals himself to mankind. In the Book of Acts, we are told that only in Jesus Christ can we be saved. ‘Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.’ Therefore, only in Christianity can we have the assurance of salvation. There is no other religion that can offer you that, do you understand this?” asked Roy.

“I see, but what about all the other religions? Buddhism, Hinduism, can’t those people find their way to God through their own religions?” Asked David.

“There are many things that people worship that is not of God and most of them are man-made religions and traditions. As I told you, the Word of God, the Bible, says that there is only one name on which we can be saved—Jesus Christ. Therefore, the assurance of salvation and the resurrection to eternal life with the Son of God is only found in Christianity.” Roy repeated.

“But that just not seem fair?” Protested David. “I mean what about all those millions of people who live in far-off countries

around the world who might never have heard of Christ? And all the others, billions of people who lived and died who never heard of Christ or Christianity, they burn in hell forever for their only crime that they didn't hear the Gospel?" David's voice had grown louder for some unknown reason he could feel the anger rising up in himself now. People were starting to look at them in the quiet café, but he couldn't stop the feeling of righteous indignation rising and so, although he lowered his voice a bit, he continued.

"And what about my grandad? He was a good man, hard-working and never took anything from anyone. He worked from morning to night seven days a week to feed his family until he died aged eighty-three. He didn't believe in anything. Is he going to burn forever just because he didn't believe in your God? 'Cos I tell you; I wouldn't want to spend a day in your heaven knowing that my old grandad was burning in hell forever. That does not sound like the loving God that you talked about earlier." Said David and sat back into his chair crossing his arms.

"And it's not." Replied Roy.

"What?" asked David incredulously.

"God is the God of love. Can you imagine a loving God that would torture people forever? No, of course not. We cannot even imagine the worst criminal torturing people forever let alone the God of love. However, God is also the God of justice and mercy. The Law of God demands that justice must be served but it would not be merciful to burn someone forever no matter what their crime. You see, even biblical, what we call 'Old Testament Law' was fair even though, to many people today, it seems barbaric. You know 'an eye for an eye' and all that. In the old days if someone knocked out one of your eyes you would maybe want to kill him as revenge. But that is not justice. A human life for an eye! No, God gave justice so that people would not go beyond what was fair. At the end of the Bible in the book of Revelation chapter twenty, we are told that those that die in their sins will be judged according to their works and those found unworthy of eternal life will be thrown in the lake of fire which is the second death. It is true that the wicked will be burned but not forever. They will be burned to

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

destruction; this is what the Book of Revelation calls—The Second Death. The reward for the faithful is eternal life and the punishment for the wicked is eternal death.” Replied Roy.

“So, are you saying that the Hindu’s and Buddhists and all the rest who never heard of Christ could be judged worthy of eternal life?” asked David.

“The book of Revelation makes it clear that there are two resurrections. The first is for those that are faithful to God and Christ. The second and final resurrection takes place at the end of the world where all other people are judged according to their works. Now, the Bible also makes it clear that Christians are not judged according to their works. Christ himself said that those who hear his words and believe in God have eternal life and will not be judged. Therefore, we are given to understand that people, non-Christians, at the judgment, are judged according to their works and, as there would be no point in having a judgment if all the people are going to be condemned, we understand that some, if they had not rejected salvation through Jesus Christ, then, depending on the severity of their sins, they could be shown mercy and judged worthy of eternal life. But even then, this judgment of mercy would come from Christ as we know that there is no other name on which we can be saved.” Roy answered.

“Yeah ok, I understand, but then if what you’re saying about the judgment of non-Christians is true then maybe even my old grandad would be judged by his works like Hindus and Buddhists and other non-Christians and maybe he would stand a chance of being judged worthy of eternal life too, right?” David asked.

“That is correct. If people die without a saving faith in Jesus Christ, then they die in their sins and are judged by their sins. But if your grandfather heard the Gospel in his lifetime and never accepted Jesus’ sacrifice for his sins then that is unbelief, a rejection of salvation, one of the sins worthy of eternal death listed in the book of Revelation chapter twenty-one verse eight. But you say your grandfather never believed, but how do you know? Were you there the day that he died?” Asked Roy.

THE CONFESSION

"No, I was just a boy!" Answered David defensively, a little unnerved by what he perceived to be a very personal question.

"Then you do not know if he came to faith in Jesus in the last moments of his life. Some people do." Answered Roy.

"Well I don't know for sure, but if he never believed and if he didn't get given this gift of eternal life, he would not burn in hell forever, right? I mean, that's what you're saying, right?" Persisted David.

"Aye, that is right. Our loving and merciful God does not torture people forever." Roy confirmed.

"If that's true that non-Christians could be judged worthy of eternal life, then what is the advantage of being a Christian?" Asked David.

"True Christians have the gift of the Holy Spirit, the Comforter living inside us and through that spirit, we receive guidance and experience real joy, peace and love in this life despite any hardships that we might endure. And, as I told you before, God provides for the needs of his children. But the greatest advantage is that we receive the assurance of salvation here and now in this life. We have the guarantee that if we keep the faith, we will have eternal life. When you have this assurance, whether you live or die is not so important anymore. Non-Christians do not have the Holy Spirit and so they do not know real joy, peace, and love. And they worry and struggle to get ahead in a corrupt world and they have no assurance of salvation but will be judged and therefore they risk eternal death. You see, there is a great advantage of being a Christian." Roy answered.

"Hmm." David pondered but appeared satisfied with what he had heard.

David then reached in his pocket and took out the list of questions on the crumpled A4 paper that he had asked Roy at their first meeting. He looked down at the last point on his list which simply read: 'Islam'.

"You said that people have to accept Jesus to receive salvation, right?" Asked David.

"Aye, that is right." Answered Roy.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

“Well in Islam, the Muslims also claim to believe in Jesus, don’t they?” Asked David.

“Islam is the most deceptive of all the world’s religions. Islam claims to believe in Jesus but reveres what the Bible calls ‘another Jesus’ who they call Isa. Islam claims that their Isa is the same Jesus as in the New Testament. But their Isa is only a prophet and not the Son of God, whereas Jesus’ own disciples called him the Son of God in the New Testament and Jesus did not deny it and Jesus himself, said in John 10:36 that they accused him of blasphemy because he had said that he was the Son of God. And for that very reason, they had him crucified. The New Testament also tells us that whoever denies the Son is Antichrist. Islam is the only religion to explicitly deny that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and therefore Islam is, without doubt, the religion of the antichrist. Furthermore, Islam also crucially denies the sacrifice on the cross and the resurrection. If you don’t believe that Christ gave his life for your sins and was raised from the dead, then Christ will not forgive your sins and raise you from the dead to eternal life.” Roy answered.

“So, if Islam is the religion of the antichrist, are you saying that all Muslims are evil? Asked David.

“No of course not. The vast majority of Muslims are cultural Muslims, who don’t strictly follow the teachings of Islam and many of them have never even read the Quran. For the most part, they are no better or worse than anyone else in the world. But fundamentalist Muslims are most definitely evil as the fundamental message of the Quran is one of violence, oppression, and slavery. Most Muslims are born into the faith and any that would leave, fear doing so, as Islam calls for the death penalty for apostasy. The Quran calls the followers of their god, Allah, his slaves. In contrast to Islam, in Christianity, you are not born a Christian. And the true God of the Bible does not have slaves but servants and eventually children. Jesus tells us that to become a follower of Christ, that is a true Christian and a child of God, you must be born again and that will only happen when you believe in your heart that Jesus Christ is indeed the Son of God. So, in answer to your question, no, not

all Muslims are evil and most of them have the same chance of salvation as the rest of us.” Informed Roy.

“But didn’t Islam also come from Abraham, the same Abraham from Judaism and Christianity?” asked David.

“Muslims claim that Abraham was a follower of Islam, however Islam, in fact, started with Muhammed, the Islamic Prophet who was born over 2,600 years after Abraham. However, we can find the roots of Islam in the story of Abraham. Abraham’s home city was the ancient city of Ur of Mesopotamia in modern-day Iraq. Many so-called gods were worshipped in Mesopotamia, but the god of Ur was the moon god Sin who was worshipped as the chief god and father of all the gods. His sign was a bull, the crescent moon and the head of a sickle. This is the sign you see on top of all mosques. The God of the Bible told Abraham to leave his home city and go to a land that God promised he would give him for an inheritance. Abraham trusted God and left his home city with the false gods and followed the true God and eventually Abraham’s descendant Israel inherited the promised land. Fast forward 2,600 years and around 610 AD the religion of Islam was given to Muhammed by an ‘angelic being’ in a cave in the desert in present-day Saudi Arabia. After being visited by this angelic being, Muhammad reportedly tried to kill himself several times and told his wife he thought that the angel that visited him was demonic. Having been reassured by his wife he eventually accepted the message of this angelic being. Mohammed at first tried peacefully for several years to spread the word of his new faith but he was rejected and mocked and so he resorted to violence and Mohammed became a warrior and spent the remainder of his life killing to prove his god was supreme. At the age of sixty-two, he fell ill for several days and reportedly died of a fever, severe head pain, and weakness. This is not how the true prophets of the God of the Bible live and die. In the Bible, the true prophets of God are the ones that are persecuted and killed. Anyway, Muhammed claimed to be an Ishmaelite from the Quraysh tribe born in Mecca, Arabia. Incidentally, the present-day ISIS caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi al-Qurayshi also claims to come from the same Quraysh tribe.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

Anyway, the Ishmaelites trace their roots back to Ishmael. Ishmael was Abraham's son with a servant woman given to him by his wife Sarah. It's an intricate story and you need to read this for yourself but Abraham's wife Sarah was barren and although God had promised that Abraham would be blessed with many descendants, as many as the stars in the night sky, he had reached old age and still had no children. Sarah persuaded Abraham to take her maid-servant, Hagar, as a second wife so that they could have a child by her, and he did, and the child born to Hagar was Ishmael. Later God fulfilled his promise to Abraham and he, miraculously in his old age, had another son called Isaac with his wife Sarah when she was 90 years old! God said his promise would be with this son Isaac, not Ishmael. In the culture of the day, the first-born son would have expected to be the one to inherit Abraham's promises from God and we know that Ishmael was jealous and angry. The Bible tells us that Ishmael mocked his younger half-brother Isaac and that Ishmael's mother, Hagar, despised Sarah. But the story does not end there and may well be far more complex than that." Said Roy stopping to take a sip of his coffee.

"You see, Isaac grew and married his wife Rebecca and she became pregnant. She struggled with the pregnancy and prayed to God to know why and God told her that there were twins in her womb and that the older would serve the younger. When she eventually gave birth, the firstborn was Esau followed by his brother Jacob. When the twins were grown, one day Esau gave away his birthright to Jacob for a pot of broth which was a despicable thing to do. Later when Isaac was old, he wanted to give the traditional blessing of the firstborn to his son Esau. However, Rebecca remembered what God had told her when she was pregnant, so she guided Jacob to pretend that he was Esau, and his father gave him the blessing of the firstborn instead. Esau was now incensed with his brother and vowed to kill him. But God said that his promise to Abraham would pass through Jacob as he was more righteous than Esau and God changed Jacob's name to Israel. The Bible tells us that Esau is Edom and Edom's location is south-east of Israel. We are also told that his descendants would live in fertile spots and that they will

live by the sword. Furthermore, we are told that God hated Esau and laid his cities waste. The country south-east of Israel is Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is indeed a wasteland and its fertile spots are its oases. It is composed of a collection of warring tribes. When we look at the flag of Saudi Arabia you will see it that it indeed has a sword and the emblem of Saudi Arabia is of a palm tree of the oasis and two crossed swords. And just as Esau hated Jacob who is Israel; Esau which is Saudi Arabia hates Israel and has no diplomatic relations with the country. Interestingly the Bible also tells us that at the end time, Esau will break the yoke of his brother Jacob from his neck. This implies that the country will become self-sufficient before the return of Christ. Interestingly, up until 1938, Saudi Arabia was one of the poorest countries in the world, that is, until the discovery of oil by the Americans. Today it is one of the richest countries in the world and Saudi Arabia is indeed self-sufficient. Saudi Arabia is also the home of the cities of Mecca and Medina, and the home of Islam. This explains why the Islamic world has always had a hatred for Israel. In fact, although Mohammed claimed to be from the line of Ishmael, he was more likely to have been from the line of Esau but regardless, the stories of Ishmael and Esau mirror the story of Satan.” Roy concluded.

“How so?” Asked David.

“You remember the book of Revelation, that last book of the New Testament?” Asked Roy.

“Yes, although I must admit I found it quite confusing.” Admitted David.

“Do you remember there is one particular beast that causes everyone to worship him or be killed?” asked Roy.

“Yes, something like the mark of the beast, six six six and all that.” Replied David.

“Well, my friend, that beast is Islamic. ‘The Beast of the Earth’ in the Book of Revelation who represents Satan is actually a good beast according to Islam. They call it the *Dābbat al-Ard*¹ and it is a

1. The *Dābbat al-Ard* or Beast of the Earth is mentioned in the Quran in Sura 27 and, according to Islamic eschatology, will be one of the signs of the coming of the Last Day.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

beast that appears at the end time and punishes those who refuse to accept Islam.” Informed Roy.

“So, Islam is in the Bible?” asked David.

“The Bible does not tell us the name of the religion of anti-Christ, but the description fits Islam and no other religion even comes close.” Replied Roy. “For example, you’ve seen on TV perhaps the thousands of Muslims at Mecca going around the Kaaba,² a sort of black square-shaped building at the Grand Mosque in Mecca?” asked Roy.

“Yes, on their Hajj³ right?” answered David.

“Indeed, well that building in one corner contains a Black Stone and it is this stone that all Muslims in the world direct their prayers towards literally, they face in its direction when they pray. Muhammed, himself put that black stone in its place. Now, Islamic tradition claims that this black stone has eyes and ears and lips to speak and Mohammed said at the end times that it will speak up for all those who worshipped it and against all those that profane it. Islamic tradition has it that it was once an angel. This black stone appears to be the image that will be given a mouth to speak in the Book of Revelation and cause all who would not worship it to be killed.” Informed Roy.

“But don’t they say that Islam is the religion of peace?” asked David.

“Aye, indeed they do say that but I’m afraid a religion of peace it is not.” Replied Roy. “As I told you, Muhammed, after founding Islam, spent the rest of his life as a warrior as did his contemporary followers. Most of Islam’s relatively short history has been spent conquering and subjugating other people in the name of their god. Islamic intolerance of other faiths is obvious even to the unreligious. For example, there is not one Christian church permitted in the whole of Saudi Arabia, the home of Islam. This intolerance is written in the Quran and is particularly strong against the Jews. Not

2. The Kaaba is the black building at the center of Islam’s most important mosque, Al-Masjid Al-Ḥarām, in the city of Mecca, Saudi Arabia. It is the most sacred site in Islam.

3. The Hajj is the annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

content with Mecca and Medina as the two Islamic capitals they also claim Jerusalem, the one Jewish capital as their third. But it is not surprising that Muslims call Islam the religion of peace because they themselves have been deceived because the Quran claims that their god Allah is a great deceiver. In Islamic Sharia law, a Muslim is allowed to deceive and lie for the benefit of the faith, it is a practice called Taqiyya.⁴ In contrast, the Bible tells us it is impossible for God to lie and Jesus Christ said that Satan is a liar and the father of all lies and the book of Revelation tells us that the Beast of Satan will deceive the whole world. If you compare the god of the Quran with the God of the Bible you will notice they are characteristically diametric opposites. Similarly, the Bible's antichrist appears to be the Islamic Imam⁵ Mahdi⁶ that Muslims call their redeemer who, at the end time, comes to fight against those that do not accept Islam, and Islam's antichrist, the Al-Masih ad-Dajjal⁷ whom they also call 'The Imposter' appears to be Jesus Christ whom they will not accept because they do not believe that God can have a son." Roy paused to allow David to process the information. He took another sip of coffee and then continued.

"Perhaps I should start at the beginning. It all started with the fall of mankind which happened in the garden of Eden which you can read about in the first book of the Old Testament called Genesis. You see, Satan was a created angel, a high angel, a Cherubim and angels are spiritual beings created before all other creation. God finally created mankind and as mankind was created in the image of God, God called all the angels to worship mankind. However, Satan's pride could not allow him to worship mankind because, he reasoned, that as mankind was created after him, mankind must be inferior to him. He was outraged! So, he refused. The way he

4. Taqiyya is an Islamic principle which allows a Muslim to lie.

5. An Imam is an Islamic leadership position most commonly used as the title of a worship leader of a mosque.

6. The Mahdi meaning: the guided one, is an eschatological redeemer of Islam who will appear and rule before the Day of Judgment.

7. The Al-Masih ad-Dajjal meaning: the false messiah, an evil figure in Islamic eschatology, is to appear before the Day of Resurrection.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

saw it was that, as he was created first, mankind should worship him! He was jealous of God's love for mankind, so he made war against mankind starting with the lie he told Eve in the garden of Eden." Informed Roy.

"Eating the apple?" Prompted David.

"The Bible does not tell us what exactly the fruit was of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil but there were many trees in the garden of Eden which Adam and Eve could eat of and there was also the Tree of Life. God said that Adam and Eve could eat from any tree except the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. He told Adam that if they ate from it, they would die. Satan deceived Eve by telling her that what God had said was not true and they would not die but if they ate from it, they would be like God himself knowing good and evil. Satan deceived Eve and she ate of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and she gave the fruit to Adam and he ate too. God cursed Satan because he had deceived mankind and the whole earth was cursed because of the disobedience to the Eternal Law. Adam and Eve were also cursed with pain and suffering in their lives and as children of Adam and Eve, that curse falls onto us that, through suffering, we will learn to understand the consequence of sin and choose life over death. As God had said and the Law of the Life demands, Adam and Eve did die. Satan had murdered Eve by deceiving her into believing that a fruit which was poisonous to her was good for her. He deceived her to sin in disobeying God and that sin killed her as she had broken the Law of Life. Satan uses the same deception to murder us today by deceiving us to sin believing God does not exist and God's Law of Life is obsolete.⁸ That sin kills us as surely as it killed Adam and Eve. David, you have been murdered. I have been murdered. There is nothing we can do about that. But God has made a way of salvation through the self-sacrifice of his sinless Son; Jesus Christ. You see, all sin must be accounted for. This is the immutable Eternal Law of Life, the law which God himself lives by and which cannot be broken without incurring the consequence of death. With his atoning sacrifice for our sins, Jesus satisfies the

8. Satan uses the same deception to murder us today: Romans VII XI

THE CONFESSION

law and we will, as Jesus himself tells us in the New Testament, be raised to life and given eternal life with God. As for Satan and the rebellious angels that followed him, his rebellion against God turned into all-out war when God opened the way of salvation for all mankind through the sacrifice of His Son and Satan and his angels were cast out of heaven and thrown down to earth. Satan sees mankind as his enemy and the reason of his being cast out of heaven. In time, Satan created his own counterfeit religion by deceiving a people who were willing to believe a lie because they too felt that they had been treated unjustly by the true God; these are the descendants of Ishmael and Esau the majority of whom today practice Islam.” Informed Roy.

“So, are you’re saying Islam is Satan’s religion?” asked David.

“There is only one true religion which is the worship of the true God of the Bible in the way that he commands to be worshipped and to humbly submit to his will knowing that he knows best for us all. There are many gods that people worship in their religions which are demonic or satanic, but it is just that in the end times, Satan has been allowed to start his own counterfeit religion to deceive those unwilling to believe the truth but willing to believe a lie because they do not accept God’s judgment over Ishmael and Esau concerning the heir of Abraham. Ironically, if they were to now accept the atoning sacrifice of Christ, they, along with all true believers would be joint-heirs to a far greater and eternal inheritance in the kingdom of God.” Informed Roy.

“What I don’t understand is that, if all what you’re saying is true and God exists, why doesn’t he simply stop all this now, reveal himself to the world, then all the wars and suffering would be over because we would all believe. After all, they do say that seeing is believing.” David replied.

“Aye, but then there would be no faith. You see faith is the evidence of things unseen. God indeed will reveal himself to the world in time when his plan has been fulfilled but if God were to reveal himself now, it would defeat the meaning of life itself.” Replied Roy.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

“You keep mentioning the meaning of life. What exactly is the meaning of life?” Asked David.

“The true God does not want slaves who only follow him because they know he exists and fear him; he wants servants and eventually children who love him in faith and willingly follow his only way of life. You see if we only lived our lives God’s way because we knew he existed and feared him we would not be following him out of love but out of fear. You cannot judge someone as good if they never had the opportunity to do evil and had never been tested. For a fair test, there has to be the freedom for people to believe that maybe God does not exist and therefore have no fear of God, and there has to be the freedom for people to choose to do good or evil. Our existence in this world is, therefore, a lifelong test of the human heart. That is the meaning of life.” Replied Roy.

“I see. So, our life is a test.” Pondered David nodding. “OK, I can see that but what I still don’t get is that if Christianity is the only true religion why does God allow people who call themselves Christians to do so much evil in the name of Christ, you know those Crusades and all that stuff that we talked about before.”

“It’s true that what the world calls Christianity has done some great evils. The Crusades were carried out by the Catholic Church of Rome just after the split from the Orthodox Church starting in the late 11th century. But these Crusaders were not followers of Christ they were followers of the Catholic Church. You see to be a Christian you must be a follower of Christ. The Bible tells us many things that the Catholic Church and many of the churches do is not of Christ. The church that Christ founded was a beautiful virgin bride to be, full of grace and truth. However, sadly but as prophesied in the Bible, over the centuries in her lust for power she has become morally corrupted by her political concessions and man-made doctrines so much so that she has become unrecognizable as the virgin bride that Christ left on earth. At the end, she is corrupted to such an extent that the book of Revelation describes her as a whore.” Roy admitted sadly.

“What? Why would God allow that?” asked David incredulously.

THE CONFESSION

“This is all part of God’s plan to bring us back to him. God knew that religion in the hands of mankind would be corrupted just as with the Pharisees and Sadducees, the leaders of the temple in Jerusalem whom Christ condemned for their corruption of God’s laws. However, even with this corruption, God knows that the true believers will recognize truth and hear his voice when they hear the Gospel preached, not because of the virtue of the churches but despite the lack of virtue of the churches. You see that despite the corruption, God’s word, the Gospel, the Bible is still being preached. When a soul hears that Gospel, God will call him. If he chooses to accept God’s invitation, he will be offered salvation. If he proves to be a true Christian and keeps his faith to the end of his life, he will be saved.” Replied Roy.

“You keep saying true Christian. What exactly is a true Christian?” asked David.

“A true Christian is anyone who follows the teachings of Christ and is led by the Holy Spirit. True Christians don’t follow man-made religions, man-made doctrines or corrupted Christianity. The teachings of Christ are all there to be read in the New Testament. Don’t trust anyone to tell you what it says, not even me. Read it for yourself and let the Bible speak for itself. You don’t need to be a theologian to understand the Bible. Christ said that God had hidden himself to the wise and learned and revealed himself to little children. There is, as the Apostle Paul in the New Testament tells us; a simplicity in Christ. If you want to know if someone is a true Christian compare him with how Christ said his followers should be in the New Testament. Of course, Christians are not yet perfect but if someone who calls himself a Christian is not striving to live how the New Testament describes Christians then, put simply, most likely that person is not a Christian. They might even themselves believe that they are, but they are only deluding themselves and this is very dangerous. Christ says that only those that do the will of the Father will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Even those that do miracles in his name and call him Lord, but practice lawlessness will be condemned. The book of Revelation describes

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

true Christians in the end time as the saints that keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ.” Replied Roy.

“So, are you a saint?” asked David.

“Hah, me a saint?” Replied Roy with a half-smile. “I tell you I would be honored to be called a saint, but I don’t think I’m there yet. As I told you, we Christians are a work in progress.”

“I see, so what kind of things does a true Christian have to do to earn this salvation?” asked David.

“In short, nothing! There is nothing you can do to earn salvation. Salvation is a free gift of God. The work of God is faith in Jesus Christ. If you truly believe you will also do good works to glorify God but not to earn salvation because if you believe, then you already have that. If you believe you will do good works because God’s spirit is living in you. The work in progress I was talking about is to grow in Christ, rejecting sin, in preparation for entering the Kingdom of God. This growth is a process that lasts the remaining lifetime of the true Christian.” Replied Roy.

“I see, so, are there any good churches where I can go and meet some true Christians?” asked David.

“At this late hour, precious few are still following the original teachings given to us in the New Testament of keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus Christ. Although many churches still have some true Christians in them, most of the churches themselves have wandered far away from the original teachings of Christ. So, because so few churches are now keeping the original teachings of Christ, many true Christians are now in fellowships outside of the mainstream churches. But don’t worry. As Christ tells us in the New Testament: Wherever you find two or three true believers in Christ gathered together, there you will find Christ, himself.” Replied Roy.

“You said at this late hour? Does this mean that you believe that Christ is coming back soon?” asked David.

“Aye, Christ will return, but how soon, no-one knows. But Christ warned us that we will know the time is near as there will be increasing wars, plagues and so-called natural disasters and we can see those things are indeed increasing in the world today.

THE CONFESSION

In fact, the Bible describes that time as a time of great tribulation unmatched since the beginning of the world. It is believed there will then be a short period of world peace before the beast which is anti-Christ and Islam destroys the whore which is corrupt Christianity and then Islam will rule the world for a short time before Christ returns to destroy the beast and set up his kingdom on earth." Informed Roy.

"What? Islam will rule the world? The whole world?" asked David incredulously.

"Aye, I'm afraid so. It is biblical prophecy and even the Muslims believe that." Admitted Roy.

"When you see how people live in many Islamic countries, what with the wars and terrorism, the thought of Islam taking over the whole world sounds terrifying, like a global disaster or plague." Said David incredulously.

"No, not a plague but a medicine. As I told you, this is part of God's plan. Western society is sick with the deadly disease of sin and corruption. We know that medicine is given to the sick to restore them to health. However, we also know that almost all medicines are poison; the proof of that is that if you take too much of it you will die. Our society has gone far away from God's laws and his only way of life and as a result, our society is very sick, and so God is sending this powerful poisonous medicine to cure us and restore us to life. Now when the medicine enters the sick man his antibodies are stimulated to react and fight the poison. And although in the ensuing battle many of the antibodies and the poisonous medicine are consumed in the fight, so is the disease." Informed Roy.

"So, do we fight?" asked David.

"Christ has given Christians two missions in this world: 'Keep the Faith' and 'Share the Faith'. As Christians, we are soldiers of Christ in a war to reclaim lost souls. But our war is spiritual, not physical. We 'Keep the Faith' through prayer and by arming ourselves with truth, righteousness, and faithfulness, and by being assured of our salvation, and by being ready to share the faith whatever the cost. And we 'Share the Faith' with the 'Sword of the

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

Spirit' which is the 'Word of God' by sharing the Gospel, the good news to anyone that will hear in the hope that we can lead some to salvation and eternal life. Of course, some people will hate and mock you for it and others may even kill you as they killed our Savior but when you 'Keep the Faith' to the end, your salvation, your eternal life is assured." Informed Roy.

"So, if I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who died for my sins and he was raised from the dead and I repent of my sins, my sins are forgiven, then, if I live and die as a Christian I receive the gift of eternal life." David summed up all he had heard.

"Aye." Roy simply replied.

"Just for believing and repenting?" David checked.

"Aye." Roy repeated.

"No hail Marys or good deeds?" David double-checked.

"No, but you will do the good deeds to honor God if you truly believe." Roy reminded him.

"Sounds like a good deal. And if I die and don't believe?" asked David.

"You would be judged on the unrepented sins that you have committed in life but in your case, as you have already heard the Gospel, I am afraid the sin of unbelief would ensure that you would not receive eternal life. You see, to hear the Gospel of Christ but reject Christ's offer of salvation is to reject eternal life." Informed Roy.

"Yes, that unbelief . . ." David contemplated. Then remembering again his current predicament he felt hopeless again.

"It all sounds great for the future and I want to believe but how does all this help me with the situation I'm in today?" David asked.

"I wasn't always a Christian, David. I had a past life and problems too before I came to Christ. Christ says: 'Come to me all you who are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest'. And Peter, one of Jesus' apostles, says in the New Testament that we should cast all our worries on Christ because he cares for us. In short, you need to trust in Christ. I understand the situation you are in is serious and I promise to do whatever is necessary to find a solution for you,

THE CONFESSION

but you can't allow yourself to worry about the things of this world and be faithful to Christ. When you put your trust in Christ as the Bible tells us: 'All things work together for good to them that love God.' It's about choosing life and putting our trust in Christ. Now, the question you have to ask yourself, David, is: Are you ready to choose life and put your trust in Christ?" Roy asked.

David sat for a while leaning over the table with his head resting in his hands and his fingers covering his eyes.

Just then the old man that Roy had been speaking with earlier appeared at the window of the café with the crumpled leaflet in one hand while motioning with the other for Roy to come out of the café.

"Looks like our friend is back," Roy remarked nodding to the old man. "I better go speak with him. You don't mind, do you?" he added rising from his chair.

"No, no, I better be getting back to work anyway." Said David wearily.

"Call me again whenever you want and don't worry. Remember: All things work together for good to them that love God." Said Roy placing a hand on David's shoulder.

"Yes, I will call you again." Said David, rising from his chair and picking up his New Testament from the table. "I need to decide what I really believe." He confessed.

Christmas Day

Inverness, Scotland

Next morning, it is Christmas day and Yousef and Afzal are at home sitting with their father at the kitchen table while their mother cooks the dinner. The warm smell of fried spicy potato parathas fills the house.

“Father, Afzal and I would like to spend the night with our friends in Inverness,” Yousef said. “If you agree, we will stay at his flat for the night.”

“Why don’t you bring your friends here?” asked his mother flipping a paratha over in the pan.

“It would be good, mother, but there is a non-believer coming who wants to hear the truth of the noble Qur’an,” Yousef replied. “Surely it is our duty to share the true faith with the unbelievers, father?”

“Indeed it is, my son. If I were to agree, when would you return?” Dr. Malik asked.

“You would see us tomorrow.” Replied Yousef.

Mrs. Malik came over from the stove to the table drying her hands on a kitchen towel. “I do not like Afzal to stay out at night. He is only seventeen.” She said.

“Yes indeed, but do you not remember that I was only seventeen when we married.” Dr. Malik said smiling at his wife.

Mrs. Malik smiled at the memory. “Of course I remember, but these are not those times. At night, in the dark, anything can happen.” She reasoned.

Dr. Malik thought and then decided. "OK, you can go, but you stay in the flat until morning and Afzal is to stay with you at all time." He said to Yousef.

"Thank you, father." The boys replied.

The adjoining door to the living room is open where Nilofer is sitting on the couch watching a fashion show on the TV with the sound turned down, listening intently to the whole conversation.

As the boys exit the kitchen to the living room, Nilofer quickly uses the remote control to turn up the sound on the TV again.

The boys disregard Nilofer and go up the stairs to their room. Nilofer quietly creeps up the stairs after them and into her own room and silently closes the door. She listens carefully at the wall adjoining their rooms.

"We will all meet at Mustafa's place at 6:00 PM, Inshallah." Said Yousef.

"OK, it is agreed brother." Said Afzal.

"Where are you going?" said Yousef.

"I will go to the bowling alley with my friends." Said Afzal.

"You will stay here, and we will go together to Mustafa's place." Said Yousef forcefully.

"I will go." Said Afzal assertively.

"You will not!" replied Yousef raising his voice.

"But it may be my last chance to meet my friends." Complained Afzal loudly.

"Keep your voice down!" said Yousef forcefully and then realizing he too was at risk of being heard, he spoke more softly. "OK, ok, you go see your friends, but we meet at Mustafa's place at 6:00 PM and you don't speak about tomorrow to anyone. Not to anyone. Do you understand me?"

"I understand, brother." Agreed Afzal. "See you at six."

The bedroom door squeaked open and footsteps were heard going down the stairs and then the sound of the front door closing.

Nilofer picks up her mobile phone and sends a text to Liz:

'It is tomorrow'



YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

The sun is going down as Roy gives out his last leaflet to the Christmas day lunchtime pub crowd in Inverness High Street. Across the street, he notices John in his usual spot outside the McDonald's restaurant sitting cross-legged on a piece of cardboard talking to a man with a large white plaster on his nose. Roy crosses the street to speak to John as the man walks away. John stands up to greet Roy.

"Hey, Roy, just the man." Said John shaking Roy's hand. "I think that guy was asking about that friend of yours." John jerked his thumb towards the man who was now getting into a Land Rover at the end of the High Street.

"Friend, which friend?" asked Roy.

"Your 'Sassenach'¹ friend, from London, it's David, right?" Said John.

"Aye, that's right, David." Said Roy.

"Well, that guy just told me he's looking for a mate of his from London called David Boyce. Showed me a photo of someone who looked like your friend David and offered me a thousand pound if I knew where he was!" Said John.

"What did you tell him, John?" Asked Roy seriously now.

"Well, honestly I could use the money . . ." started John.

"Aye, you and me both!" Roy admitted. "But you didn't tell him about David, did you?"

"No, that guy's a gangster, and I would know. I told him I'd let him know if I see anyone like that. He gave me a card with his number." John pulled out the card from his pocket and gave it to Roy.

"Bless you, John. You just might just be a lifesaver." Said Roy as he pulled his wallet out of his back pocket, took out a £20 note and offered it to John.

"Don't say anything, right?" He asked John.

"No, you keep your money," John said pushing Roy's hand away. "You've done me enough favors in the past and besides, your David looks like a good lad. Don't worry, I wouldn't tell that muppet anything anyway. Just thought you'd want to know."

"Indeed." Said Roy absently studying the card.

1. Sassenach. The Gaelic term for a Saxon, an English person.

CHRISTMAS DAY

“What with all the cops running around and now gangsters showing up its beginnin’ to liven up ‘round Invershnecky,”² John added.

“Cops yeah . . . What . . . what do you mean cops?” Roy managed to break his focus from the card and return his attention to John.

“You not seen? Well, word on the street is that something’s going down around that old church on Balfour Street,” said John. “If your friend David’s got anything to do with these gangsters best tell him to steer well clear of that place.” Advised John.

“Aye . . .” said Roy a little absently as a plan was forming in his mind. Suddenly he looked up at John.

“John, you are a genius!” he exclaimed patting him on the shoulder.

“Me a genius? How’s that?” asked John surprised.

“Now, I just have to work out how to bait the trap.” Said Roy absently thinking aloud.

2. Invershnecky. Local affectionate term for Inverness.

Snatch and Grab

Inverness, Scotland

Afzal was with three of his friends playing on a combat video game machine in the bowling alley arcade. The machine suddenly emits an explosive rumbling sound and flashes all its lights.

“Oh man, you got wasted.” One of his friends remarked as Afzal got killed in the game and the game ended. Afzal looked at his watch.

“I gotta go now anyway,” Afzal said and bumped his fist with his friends. “See you later.”

“Yeah, see you bro!” his friends replied and continued on their machines.

Afzal stepped out of the Bowling arcade and into the foggy, cold and dark night.

“As-Salaam-Alaikum, Afzal!” a young Asian man with a smartly trimmed beard wearing a gray Shalwar Kameez greeted him. “Brother Jamal said I might find you here.”

“Wa-Alaikum-Salaam.” Answered Afzal cautiously looking around for Jamal and the others.

“My name is Omar. Come, we must meet up with Jamal now. There has been a change of plan.” Omar explained.

“Is everything well?” Asked Afzal.

“Yes, everything is well, Insha’Allah, my brother. But come we have no time to waste.” Omar urged.

“What about my brother Yousef?” Afzal asked.

"Yousef will meet us there. Come, my car is this way." Urged Omar and put his hand on Afzal's shoulder, guiding him behind the building.

Afzal took a few steps with Omar.

"May be I will call Yousef." He declared as he stopped and pulled his mobile phone out of his jacket pocket.

"OK, do it," Omar ordered in a very western sounding voice.

"What . . . ?" said Afzal as he looked at Omar surprised by the sudden change in the accent of his voice. A moment later two men came up behind Afzal and put a black cloth bag over his head and bundled him into the side door of a black van. A young couple came around the corner of the building laughing, arm in arm and saw Afzal being bundled into the van. They stopped in their tracks and looked at Omar. Omar reached into his back pocket and pulled out his wallet.

"MI5." He announced calmly showing them his warrant ID card with a photo of 'Omar' complete with his neatly trimmed beard and wearing a suit and tie.



The black van slowed as it approached the gate at the Inverness police station and is waved through without stopping by the security man who nodded to the driver as he pressed the button to lift the gate. The van stops in front of the blue double doors in the rear car park. The driver exits the van and slides the side door open and two men climb out pulling out with them a young man with a bag over his head. Afzal is brought into the station by the MI5 snatch squad. A few minutes later, Ms. Lake, the social worker arrives at the police station at the front public reception desk explaining that she has received a call to come to the police station. She is told to please take a seat in reception until called.

Afzal is booked in at the staff reception area still with the hood on his head.

"Empty your pockets, please." Orders Omar. "Money, cell phone, keys, everything please."

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

Afzal quietly complies.

"Put all these in the envelope, I'll take this with us." Says Omar to the officer on the desk as he scoops up Afzal's mobile phone. He presses the power button on the phone noticing that it has a pin lock security code and shows it to the other officers with him then puts it in his top pocket. The desk officer scoops the rest of the items into an envelope and then buzzes the door to let them into the station.

They ascend the stairs to the second floor and Afzal is brought into interrogation room one and is seated and handcuffed to the table. Omar sits on the chair opposite and the two other MI5 officers stand behind Afzal and remove the bag from his head.

"What is all this? I have not done nothing!" complained Afzal squinting his eyes to get used to the light.

"Yes, we know that, Afzal." Informed Omar. "In fact, that's why we picked you up, so that you would not do what you were about to do." Omar noticed the expression on Afzal's face change from one of defiance to worry. "Yes, we know all about the plot and the guns, Afzal, so you better help us now to help your brother, Yousef, and the rest of the gang before anyone gets hurt."

"I am not saying nothing." Says Afzal folding his arms defiantly.

"I understand your loyalty to your brother," Omar continued, "but if you want to protect him you need to help us. These weapons you have got hold of are extremely dangerous and we are preparing to use lethal force, if necessary, to arrest your gang. Am I making myself clear?"

"It is clear you are Murtad."¹ Spat Afzal.

"No, my young friend, it is you and your friends who are apostates from the faith." Replied Omar calmly. "Now, how about you help us a little and we'll see what we can do for you?"

"Like what? I don't know anything." Lied Afzal.

Omar pulls Afzal's phone out of his top pocket and places it on the table in front of him.

1. Murtad. An apostate from Islam.

"Give me that! That's mine!" Demands Afzal. "I'm allowed a phone call, right? That is my right!"

"OK, but if I allow you one call, then you will help us, agreed?" says Omar.

"OK." Afzal nodded agreement.

Omar slides the phone across the table to Afzal who picks it up. He cleverly covers the phone with one hand as he enters the pin to unlock the phone and then scrolls to Yousef's number and then places the phone to his ear. Omar nods to the officer on Afzal's right who deftly snatches the phone out of Afzal's hand.

"What? you can't do that!" complains Afzal.

Omar rose from his chair and approached Afzal placing a hand on his shoulder. "Thank you for your assistance, Afzal." Says Omar.

Afzal shrugged the hand off of his shoulder.

"OK, you can bring in Ms. Lake now." Says Omar taking the mobile phone from the officer carefully with his forefinger and thumb before leaving the room.



On the other side of Inverness, Yousef is standing under the streetlamp outside Mustafa's flat waiting for Afzal. It is dark and cold with drizzling rain. He checks his watch: 6:02 PM. His mobile phone beeps and buzzes in his pocket announcing receipt of a text message. He pulls out his phone and reads:

'I will see you at the mosque tomorrow morning at 9 Inshal-lah Bro. Do not worry 😊.'

Yousef calls Afzal's number.

'The number you have called is not available, please try later. The number you have called . . . ' Yousef listens to the automatic voice recording then hangs up.

"Afzal!" Yousef grumbles to himself before stuffing the phone back into his pocket and walking up to Mustafa's door and knocking.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

Mustafa and Jamal are kneeling on the carpet when they hear the knock at the door.

"I will let them in," says Mustafa as he gets up and goes to the door.

Jamal hears Mustafa greeting Yousef and then they both enter the living room.

"As-Salaam-Alaikum." Jamal is still kneeling on the carpet and greets Yousef by slightly nodding his head and placing his right hand over his heart. Then noticing that he is alone he asks. "Where is Afzal?"

"Wa-Alaikum-Salaam," replied Yousef also nodding and placing his right hand over his heart. "Our father has agreed to allow me to stay here the night. Allah the most merciful has granted it." Yousef said trying to put a positive spin on the fact that his brother had let him down.

"Mother was concerned for Afzal's youth and was opposed to him staying the night and so he will meet us at 9:00 AM at the mosque tomorrow." Yousef half lied.

There was a noticeable pause in the conversation as Mustafa and Jamal exchanged concerned glances. Noticing the disappointment appearing on Jamal's face and wishing to change the conversation Yousef knelt down on the carpet and added: "Shall we pray, brothers?"

The Die is Cast

Inverness, Scotland

It is the early evening of December 25th and Liz is at the police station in Inverness in the situation room. Gordon is briefing the team.

“Now I know you’d all rather be at home with your families, but Intel informs us that the attack is planned for tomorrow, Boxing day. We believe their intended target is the ‘Eastgate Shopping Mall.’” Gordon then indicated to the A4 sized photos displayed on the board behind him and continued.

“So far we have identified these four members of the gang but there may possibly be more. The youngest member Afzal Malik has been picked up by our colleagues in MI5 and brought into protective custody. We do not believe that this compromises the operation as the gang has been led to believe that he will join them at our target building at 9:00 AM tomorrow morning where we understand the gang will be meeting immediately prior to the attack.”

Gordon then indicated the plan of the street with the old church and surrounding area on a whiteboard and continued. “This is our target building where we also believe the weapons are being stored and where we will make the arrest once we are sure that we have the whole gang in place. Operationally we will function as two teams of seven; Alpha and Omega. Angus, you will lead Alpha Team at the front door and will arrive in front of the building in two unmarked cars. The front door is made of solid oak and may well be locked so you may need the Enforcer.¹ Liz, you will lead Omega Team, parking the transit van here behind the building

1. Enforcer. UK Police battering ram.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

and then making your entrance through the back garden and rear door. The rear door will require bolt cutters as it is secured with a padlock and chain. I will be providing over-watch from our dedicated command and observation point from a third floor flat overlooking the building directly to the north here.”

Gordon continued: “At precisely 9:00 AM we will block off the top end of the street with two marked patrol cars and the other end of the cul-de-sac will be blocked by uniformed officers to stop pedestrians and cyclists from entering the street. Officers are instructed to ensure that no one enters or leaves the street after 9:00 AM. Additional uniformed officers will be on duty to ensure that the public in the residential area across the street do not venture out of their homes and stay away from the windows. Once we have the street contained, I will announce by megaphone to the gang that they are surrounded by armed officers and that they are to lay down their weapons and come out of the building with their hands raised.” Gordon paused once again before continuing.

“We expect the gang to surrender, however, in the event of resistance the rules of engagement are that you do not fire unless you, your fellow officers or a third party are in immediate danger. Both team leaders are to report to me directly by radio and I, alone, will give the green light to attack. We will be operating exclusively on channel 8 and radio checks will be carried out prior to deployment. Weapons provided will be the Heckler and Koch MP5’s and the Glock 9mm pistols. Full body armor is provided and mandatory. Medical aid will be on standby as required as is also the air ambulance.” Gordon concluded the briefing. “Questions?”



David is standing at the bar of the Red Lion Pub drinking malt Scotch whisky by the double. It is quite late in the evening and David has had plenty to drink. John walks in with some friends and although the bar is quite crowded, John recognizes David at the bar and goes over to speak with him.

“Hey David, how you doin’?” John asked.

THE DIE IS CAST

David turned to look at John without taking his supporting elbow off of the bar. After focusing his eyes, he recognizes John.

"Hey John, com 'an av a drik wif me". David mumbles as he raises his glass of whisky to John, almost hitting him in the face accidentally.

"You alright?" John asks as he leans back to avoid getting hit by the glass.

"Aye, jus' havin' a wee² drrink!" David slurred a Scottish accent.

"Another time, my man." Replies John. "You take it easy now with that stuff." Cautioned John.

"Aye, I will dat," David replies lifting the glass to his lips.

John walks out the front door of the pub and pulls his mobile phone out of his pocket and makes a call.

"Hey, John." Roy's voice answered.

"Aye Roy, ya man David's in the Red lion and plastered. I think you better come 'an get 'im." John spoke.

"Thanks, John, I'm on my way. Keep an eye on him for me." Roy replies.

"Aye, will do." Replies John and hangs up.



Twenty minutes later Roy steps into the Red Lion pub and sees John's head in the crowd. He makes his way through the crowded bar to John.

"Hey, John. Thanks for the call." Roy says, "Is he still here?"

"Aye, he's still at the bar, though I dinnae³ ken⁴ how he's still standing. He's been knocking it back like there's no tomorrow." John says.

"OK, Cheers John, I owe you one," Roy replies, patting him on the arm and turning towards the bar.

2. Wee. Scottish for little.

3. Dinnae. Local dialect for English word: Don't.

4. Ken. Local dialect for English word: Know.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

"I told you before, you owe me nothing!" John calls after him.
"Let me know if you need any help with him."

Roy turns back and nods and then makes his way through the crowd to join David at the bar.

"Come on David, it's time to go home." Says Roy.

"Roy!" David exclaims. "Yes, home, but you know, where is home? In fact, what is home? I've been trying to make sense of it all, you know."

"It'll all make sense in the morning." Replies Roy, "Now let's get you home."

"OK . . . OK," mumbles David. "Just finish my drrrink." As he tips his glass to his lips and pours the last of the whisky into his mouth.

"OK, so let's go . . ." Says Roy guiding him away from the bar. David takes a wobbly step with Roy and then turns back to the bar.

"Cannot forget me cap." He pronounces each word carefully as he takes his cap from the bar.

"Have you got the van with you?" Roy asks.

David reached into his coat pocket and felt around and pulled out the keys to the van.

"Parked it in Church Street." He remembered with a satisfied smile.

"I'll drive you home." Says Roy taking the keys.



Roy stumbles into the front door of David's apartment with David's arm slung over his shoulder. David reaches out with his other arm and turns on the light.

"Hang on, hang on." Says David as he removes his cap and fumbles to hang it on the peg by the door. The cap swings wildly and falls to the floor.

Roy staggers into the bedroom with David and lays him down on the bed.

"It makes sense . . . makes sense, all makes sense." David is mumbling.

"Aye, it'll make sense in the morning. You get some sleep now." Said Roy.

Roy removes David's shoes and then turns off the light.

Roy goes to the door of the apartment and then remembers he still has David's car keys in his pocket. Pulling them out, the card that John had given him earlier tumbles to the floor. Roy bends down to pick up the card and notices Roy's cap is also on the floor. He picks up the card and the cap and turns the card over in his hand. It is a plain white card with a mobile phone number printed on one side. He draws a deep breath, pulls out his mobile phone and dials the number.

"What?" the voice on the other end demanded impatiently.

"You offering a thousand pounds to know where David Boyce is?" Roy asked.

"Yeah, that's right." Replied the voice.

"I know where he'll be tomorrow." Roy offered.

"I'm listening." Replied the voice.



Meanwhile across the city, it is 9:00 PM and Reggie arrives in Inverness at the hotel where Sid is staying. He is driven by Jack with Rick in the front passenger seat of Reggie's gold Mercedes. As they climb out of the car, Reggie puts on his overcoat.

"F _ _ , that's taters,⁵ that is!" Exclaimed Reggie turning up the fur collar on his coat.

"Boss, shall I get the shooters from the boot?"⁶ Rick offered.

"Yeah, perhaps we can give the bellboy a tip for taking them up to the room, NOT." Bellowed Reggie. "Leave them in the motor. Jack park up in front of the reception in the lights and don't forget to put the alarm on."

Sid came striding out of the hotel to meet Reggie.

5. Taters. Shortened version of Taters in the Mould is London Cockney rhyming slang meaning: Cold

6. British English for US: 'trunk'.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

“Just got a tip, Boss. We’ll have Davy in the morning.” Sid offered while snatching Reggie’s briefcase from Rick.

“Too right we will.” Replied Reggie. “Now what kind of bar has this place got?” he continued, strolling off towards the hotel reception as the rest of the gang trailed behind him, squabbling over who should carry Reggie’s luggage.

It is Finished

Inverness, Scotland

The city is quiet. It is Boxing day morning and Inverness is bathed in twilight as the sun has not yet risen. Reggie, Sid, Rick, and Jack are sitting in Reggie's Mercedes in the car park at 'The Ferry' at the mouth of the River Ness. Although the car park sits at the end of a dead-end road, many people come here to admire the view of the grand Kessock bridge standing high out of the firth guarding the gateway to the North Sea. As it is not yet day, the illuminated red warning lights on top of the bridge's four soaring suspension towers ominously pierce the dark, navy blue sky.

Suddenly a small white van approaches the car park and then slows to a stop. Although still over one hundred yards away, Reggie's gold Mercedes can clearly be seen as the only vehicle in the car park. Sid, who is sitting in the front passenger seat of the Mercedes notices the white van and even from this distance in the half-light, he could see that David was wearing his cap.

"That's him, Boss," says Sid.

"After him Jack!" Reggie orders from the back seat, slapping Jack on the shoulder.

The white van swings round and roars off back down the road as Jack starts the Mercedes, puts the car into gear and roars off in pursuit. Sid noticing that Jack is slower off the mark than usual, sneers, but says nothing.

The white van lurches right into a side road and hurtles down a narrow alley between two buildings. The Mercedes follows but is too wide to fit in the alley and screeches to a halt at the top.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

"Boss, he's letting him get away!" Sid complains turning around to face Reggie.

"Don't you dare lose him, Jack!" Reggie threatens.

"I'm not gonna lose him!" Jack retorts and throws the Mercedes into reverse with the tires screeching.

A minute later the white van appears, racing over Cullogen Bridge with its engine roaring. David brakes hard and turns into the first street on the left. A few seconds later Reggie's gold Mercedes comes roaring over the bridge at seventy miles an hour. Sid notices the cul-de-sac sign at the end of the street where David turned into.

"We got him now, Boss—that's a dead-end street!" said Sid pointing out the road sign.

Jack screeches the Mercedes around the corner into the side street after the van.

"All teams standby, I repeat standby. We have a situation." Gordon calls on the radio as he watches the two vehicles speed into the cul-de-sac from the command and observation point in the flat across the street from the old church.

The van screeches to a halt in an open car park less than fifty yards from the old church, the van driver's door flies open, and David sprints across the car park and jumps over the low wall in front of him.

Jack screeches up behind the van blocking its escape as all the Mercedes' doors fly open at once and Reggie and the gang spill out into the car park.

As the four men start to take off after David, Reggie grabs Jack by the arm.

"Jack, you stay with the motor!" Reggie barks, before taking off after the others.

In the yard on the other side of the wall, David squeezes through a gap in the fence and into an overgrown garden on the other side of the yard, as first Sid then Rick and then Reggie jump over the wall and into the yard.

“Two vehicles have entered the car park. Four males appear to be entering the rear of the target area. One male remains in a gold-colored Mercedes in the car park.” Gordon informed.

“Alpha team move into secondary position and hold. Detain suspect in gold Mercedes.” Gordon ordered.

Meanwhile, David lifts up a piece of old plywood lying in the garden and takes a shiny crowbar from underneath before running up the steps to the rear entrance of the old church. The door is padlocked with a chain and David uses the crowbar and levers the lock and chain free of the door. David quickly glances back and sees that the gang are close behind. He pulls the door open and rushes into the building as the door swings shut behind him.

“Omega team to control, one unidentified male has just entered the target building at the rear. Three other males appear to be following. Over.” Liz reported over the radio. From her position behind the trees at the back of the garden, Liz was unable to see the men clearly.

“Omega Team, confirm when all suspects are in the building,” Gordon commands.

Jack is sitting in the driver’s seat of the Mercedes, nervously drumming his fingers on the dashboard. Suddenly he notices a car draw up alongside him on the passenger side. The driver is wearing a menacing black ski mask and points directly at him. Unnerved, Jack immediately starts the car and throws it into reverse before noticing in the rear-view mirror another car parked behind him full of men in black ski masks blocking his escape. Panicking, he throws open the driver’s door to run straight in the arms of Sergeant Angus.



Inside the old church, it is dark. The electricity supply has still not been reconnected. Jamal, Mustafa, and Yousef are unpacking the weapons which they had concealed under a tarpaulin that they will use in the attack at the shopping mall later that day. They are all dressed in Shalwar Kameez and as they work, their flashlights

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

create shadows on the stained-glass windows. They stop as they hear the sound of someone bursting in the backdoor and running into the building.

"What was that?" Whispers Mustafa as they all look nervously at each other with the weapons in their hands.

"Maybe it is Afzal?" whispers Yousef weakly.

Jamal does not look convinced and silently cocks his AK47. The others copy him. Jamal puts his finger to his lips and motions for them to follow him.

Meanwhile, Reggie and his gang follow David through the back door of the old church, pulling out their pistols. David reaches the main entrance of the old church and pulls on the old oak door.

"Oh no you don't!" Reggie bellows as he raises his pistol, silencer attached, aims at David, and fires. The bullet leaves the barrel of the gun with a loud clack and finds its target in the middle of David's back.

"Omega team to control, all suspects are now inside the building. Possible shot fired. Over." Liz reported over the radio from the back of the building.

"Omega team understood. All suspects are inside the building. Can you confirm shot fired?" Gordon demanded.

Liz looked at the masked policeman next to her who shook his head doubtfully.

"Omega team unable to confirm, Over." Reported Liz.

"Omega Team understood. Omega team unable to confirm shot fired. Omega team move into primary position and hold. All teams wait on my order. I will give the announcement to surrender in precisely thirty seconds. Standby, Standby." Gordon commands.

Omega team enters the garden at the back of the old church and takes position at the rear door.

Reggie and his gang stroll up to David and turn him over. Even in the dimly lit hallway, it is obvious it is not David despite the cap.

Reggie puzzled: "What the f _ _ ? That's not Davy!"

IT IS FINISHED

Reggie grabs the man by the collar and leans down into his face. "Who the f _ _ _ are you and where the f _ _ _ is Davy?" he bellows.

"It's finished." Roy slurs and closes his eyes for the last time.

"YOU IN THE BUILDING. YOU ARE SURROUNDED BY ARMED POLICE. LAY DOWN YOUR WEAPONS AND COME ON OUT WITH YOUR HANDS UP." Gordon's voice booms over the megaphone.

Reggie lets go of Roy whose body slumps to the floor. "Now what?"

Reggie and his gang exchange puzzled glances.

In the main room, Mustafa and Yousef clutch their AK47's nervously and look to Jamal for direction. Jamal calmly nods his head. He holds up three fingers. Slowly he counts down silently with his fingers showing three—two—one.

"Allahu Akbar!" The jihadists scream in unison and suddenly, and as one, they burst into the nave pointing their AK47s at Reggie, Sid, and Rick.

Reggie and his gang spin on their heels and raise their pistols at the jihadists as Reggie yells "What the F _ _ _?"

Sid and Mustafa recognize each other for a split second but too late to stop it. All hell breaks loose.

"Shots fired. Shots fired!" all police teams report on the radio as sustained gunfire reverberates from the building creating flashes on the stained-glass windows.

"All teams GREEN LIGHT go, go, go!" Gordon shouts into the radio.

Angus' Alpha team roars out of the car park and down the cul-de-sac screeching to a halt in front of the old church. The team spills out of the doors of the cars and head towards the front door of the old church.

Meanwhile, Liz is the first to enter the back door of the old church.

"ARMED POLICE DROP YOUR WEAPONS!" Liz yells as she enters aiming her rifle and followed by the rest of Omega

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

team. A few seconds later Angus and Alpha team breach the oak front door.

As the smoke clears inside the old church it is evident that everyone inside is lying dead on the floor except Jamal the only survivor. He is sitting propped up against a wall facing Liz with a bullet wound in his chest. Jamal smiles, as he raises his Kalashnikov with his left hand pointing it towards Liz who immediately responds with a burst of fire.

Redemption

Inverness, Scotland

David wakes in his bed with a hangover and tries to focus his eyes as he looks at his watch. It reads 10:15 AM. “Oh no!” he mumbles clasp- ing head.

He stumbles out of bed into the bathroom and washes his face. After getting dressed hurriedly he looks at himself in the mirror by the door and runs his fingers through his hair then reaches for his cap on the peg. The cap is not there. He looks on the floor, searches in the bedroom and in his jacket pocket. The cap is nowhere. He returns to the front door and reaches for the keys to the van in the tray by the door. The keys are not there. Suddenly his mobile rings. He pulls his phone out of his pocket. It is Kathy calling.

“Hey, Kathy.” David manages to croak.

“Oh, thank God, I thought you were dead.” Said Kathy relieved.

“Dead, what?” David’s head was throbbing, and he did not trust his ears.

“There’s been a shooting in Inverness. Didn’t you hear? It’s all over the news. Switch on your telly!”¹ Said Kathy.

David plugged in the TV and switched it on. The image on the TV showed an aerial live broadcast, obviously from a helicopter, of the area around a street in Inverness full of police cars and ambulances and uniformed people moving around. David noticed the gold Mercedes with all the doors open and recognized it instantly

1. Telly. English slang for Television

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

as Reggie's. Incredibly he noticed the white van in front of it with the driver's door open as his van. The camera zooms in on a police-woman wearing a bulletproof vest who appears vaguely familiar.

"David . . . ?" David could hear Kathy's voice but could only stare at the TV screen, trying to make sense of the images he was seeing.

"We are still receiving reports of a shooting in Inverness. And I can now report that Police Scotland have confirmed that this was, in fact, a planned police operation and are that there have been multiple casualties. Police have so far issued no information as to the status of those casualties although unconfirmed reports speak of a number of fatalities." The reporter announced.

"Is Reggie dead?" mumbled David. That would solve all his problems he mused to himself. Maybe he would become a believer if that were true.

The news switched to live pictures showing a crowd of masked Palestinian men on the streets of Gaza waving Kalashnikov rifles and carrying posters of a young man with the name Jamal while a white-haired old man was handing out sweets to Palestinian children.

"And we are just hearing that the police have now confirmed that this is believed to be a terrorist-related incident . . . we hope to have more on that story for you later." The reporter continued.

"David . . . David?" Kathy's voice on the mobile was becoming more insistent. David had forgotten that she was still on the line.

"I don't understand it." Said David absently.

"That's my van alright and that's definitely Reggie's Mercedes. How is this terrorism? I don't know what's going on. Babe, let me call you back."

"I'm coming up." Said Kathy.

"No, err, we don't know . . ." started David.

"I'm coming." Said Kathy emphatically.

David was in no condition to argue.

"OK, babe, I'll call you when I know more," said David.

"OK, David, See you tonight." Said Kathy and hung up.

REDEMPTION

David thought for a moment and then calls Roy. There is no answer.

The doorbell rings.

John is standing on the doorstep of the flat as David opens the door.

"John!" David says with surprise shaking his hand. "Come in!"

As they walk into the flat John starts to speak.

"I suppose you've heard what happened?" asked John.

"Yeah, I just saw it on the news. They're saying it was terrorism. My van was there. Do you know what's going on?" asked David.

John took a deep breath. "David, there's no easy way to say this. Roy came to see me early this morning, said he had a plan to fix your problem. Roy took your van and told me that if anything happened to him to give you this." John pulled out a crumpled piece of paper from his pocket and passed it to David.

David unfolded the paper and read:

'David, if you are reading this then something went a wee bit different from what I planned. However, I want you to know that I don't regret what's happened. As Christ told us we must be prepared to lay down our lives for our friends as he lay down his life for us. As I told you before: All things work together for good to them that love God. David, I have given you the knowledge of God, the truth, what you do with it now is up to you. Be blessed in your life and above all things: Keep the Faith and we will meet again. - Roy.'

"He was trying to lead the London gang into hands of the police . . . I'm afraid he's dead, David," said John.

"Dead, . . . Roy?" said David staring at the picture on the TV.

On the TV, the pictures now show a body covered by a white sheet being carried on a stretcher out of the old church.

David turned off the television.

Epilogue

Inverness, Scotland

It is 11:00 AM on a cold and misty morning in early January in Inverness. David and Kathy are standing next to the pastor at Roy's funeral in the graveyard at the New Free Church of Inverness. Standing in a loose semicircle around the graveside are about twenty young people with facial piercings and multi-colored punk hairstyles. John is standing among them in his trademark tartan hoodie with a black armband. An old man in a long gray Mackintosh is watching in the distance, standing under a tree next to the dry-stone wall at the back of the graveyard. The pastor is speaking.

"... and Christ called his disciples his friends and we are also his disciples and friends if we live as he has taught us. Christ taught us to love one another, he said: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." The pastor nodded to David, who lets go of Kathy's hand and steps forward to speak.

"Roy was my friend. I didn't know him very well, but he cared enough about me to warn me that I was dead in my sins. That was the bad news. But he also gave me the good news that there is a true God who sent his Son, Jesus to save us from our sins. And when we believe he gave his life for our sins and that God raised him from the dead and make him Lord of our lives, we will inherit eternal life with him." David paused.

"I couldn't believe that, and I had so many questions for Roy and I guess I was trying to find a reason not to believe. But Roy was patient and took the time to answer all my questions and showed

EPILOGUE

me how the Bible was true. I would like to read something for you that I found in the Bible.” David pulled the New Testament that Roy had given him out of his pocket and read:

“Jesus said: ‘Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.’ Roy proved to me in the greatest possible way that he was my friend.” David felt tears welling up in his eyes and his voice began to quake. He blinked his eyes, coughed to clear his throat and then continued:

“One of the last things Roy told me was that all things work together for those who love God. I couldn’t see that then, I do now. I believe that Jesus Christ died for my sins, I believe that God raised Jesus from the dead and I believe that Roy will live again.” David concluded and returned to Kathy’s side. Kathy gave him a reassuring smile as she put her hand in his.

The pastor continued:

“Now we know that those that die in Christ will be raised in Christ, and those that are raised in Christ will live with Christ in everlasting life. This is not the end, dear friends, but for now, we commit our friend Roy’s body back to the earth from whence it came in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life, in Jesus Christ, Amen.”

A young couple with matching bright green hair approached the pastor to speak with him. John came up to David and offered his hand.

“Sure makes you think a bit, doesn’t it? You know, what Roy was saying and all that. Do you really believe what you said there?” Asked John.

“Yes, John, I really do.” Replied David shaking John’s hand.

“You gonna be alright?” David asked noticing that John looked shaken.

“Aye . . . Aye, I believe I will,” replied John taking a deep breath.

David puts his arms around John and gives him a manly hug, patting him on the back. John is a little startled and has his hands down by his sides, but he slowly moves them up and pats David on the back a little awkwardly.

YOU HAVE BEEN MURDERED!

"You'll be just fine," David says to John releasing him and patting him on the shoulder.

David turns to Kathy and taking her by the hand again, they turn to walk away.

"Don't be a stranger now!" John calls after him, trying to keep his emotions in check.

As they continue walking towards Kathy's car, Kathy turns to David and asks: "So, what are we going to do now?"

David stops to think, then nods his head and his solemn face breaks into a broad smile as he says: "Have you got an emergency kit in your car?"



Snow is gently falling on the Highlands of Scotland giving the Cairngorms the appearance of several enormous well-dusted Cloutie Dumplings. In the High Street of Inverness, an elegantly dressed young lady wrapped in a trench coat, woolen hat, scarf, and knee-high boots is hurrying along. It was cold and she walked fast to keep warm, her boots crunching through a virgin layer of crisp white snow. As she turns the corner to enter Argyle Street a woman wearing a Hi-Vis vest is standing in her way. The young lady takes a step to the side to pass the woman who thrusts a leaflet into her hand saying something about a murder. She instinctively takes the leaflet and continues to walk on, then stops and turns back towards the woman.

"I'm sorry, what did you say?" the young lady asks the woman, who is handing out leaflets with a man also wearing a Hi-Vis vest.

Kathy smiles pleasantly, points to the leaflet in the young lady's hand and replies:

"You have been murdered!"

The End (and a New Beginning).

*Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin,
but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

—ROMANS VI XI

